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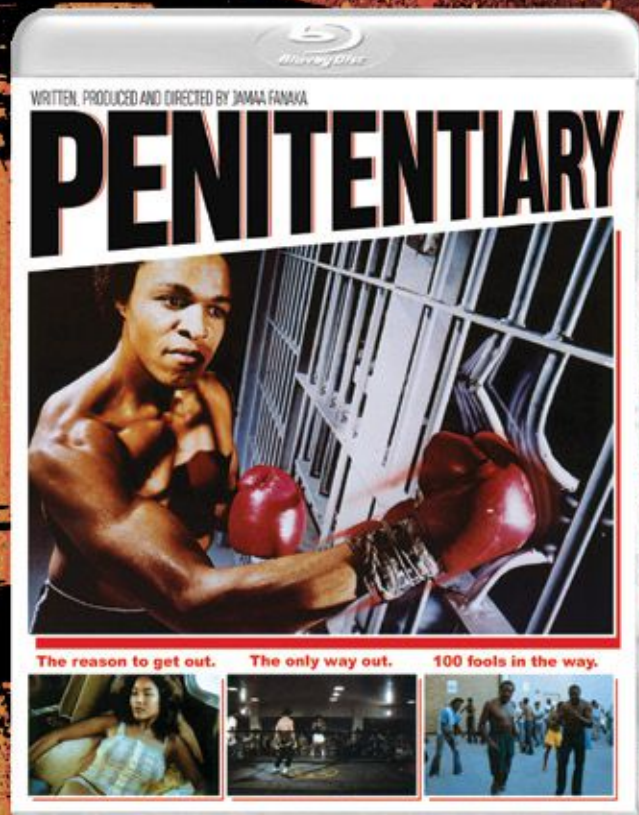
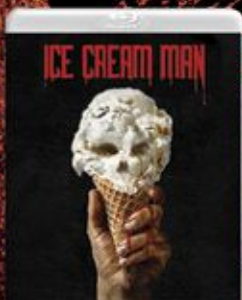
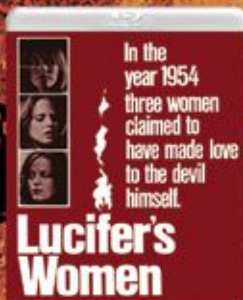
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Dedicated to the Memory and Living Legacy of George A. Romero

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GEORGE A. ROMERO: BETWEEN NIGHT AND DAWN

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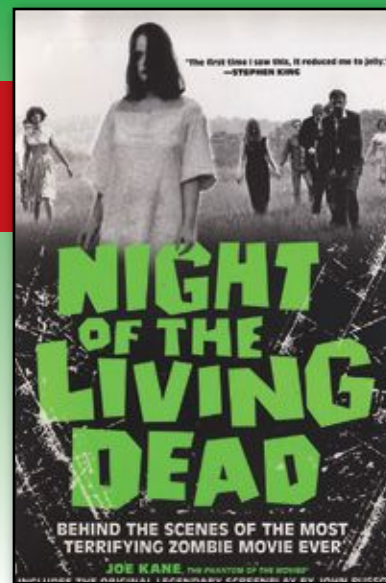
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The Phantom Speaks!

WINTER CHILLIN': With an eye toward keeping warm while staying cool, we celebrate **VideoScope's** 25th year with our Winter Cult Thrills Edition. Injecting a bit of summer sun and fun into the season is **Jaws** co-scenarist and versatile comedy veteran Carl Gottlieb, who shares his behind-the-scenes Spielbergian experiences and other genre-film forays, from **The Jerk** to **Amazon Women on the Moon**, with our dynamic dad/daughter duo, Terry & Tiffany DuFoe. Actress/producer Lauren Ashley Carter recounts her time working in intense indie genre outings from Chad Crawford Kinkle's **Jug Face** to Lucky McKee's **Woman** and Mickey Keating's **Darling**. In the vintage arena, we were fortunate enough to reprint late, great auteur Michael (A Matter of Life and Death) Powell's 1989 American Museum of the Moving Image address on the perils of creating his pioneering meta-psycho masterpiece **Peeping Tom**, a film that virtually killed his theretofore distinguished career. We likewise cover a busy slate of rediscovered genre greats newly issued on Blu-ray and DVD, including James Whale's brilliantly restored **The Old Dark House** (Cohen Media), the hitherto elusive Bela Lugosi/John Carradine team-up **Return of the Ape Man**, the Val Lewton-like **The Vampire's Ghost** (both via Olive Films), Dick Maas's killer elevator chillers **The Lift** and **Down** (Blue Underground), Jack Sholder's sly sci-fi film **The Hidden** (Warner Archive), Ed Wood's **The Violent Years** (AGFA/Something Weird) and **Orgy of the Dead** (Vinegar Syndrome), among many other recently recovered gems. In the indie arena, Debbie Rochon reports from the set of Brett Mullen's giallo-styled thriller **Fantasma**, while Jeff Strate attends the gala premiere of Minnesota mini-mogul Christopher Mihm's '50s fright homage **Demon with the Atomic Brain**. Tim Ferrante and Scott Voisin devote a timely *Split Screen* debating the merits of John Frankenheimer's original **The Manchurian Candidate** vs. Jonathan Demme's 2004 remake, Nancy Naglin explores the backstory behind 1963's still-controversial epic **Cleopatra**, and our ever-erudite array of columnists and crix weigh in with their latest filmic findings.

PHLATSCREEN PHLASHES: During the run-up to press time, we managed to revisit, some after many years' absence, a number of recently resurfaced oldies, as well as catch up with a few worthy flicks we'd missed. On the fright front, we became reacquainted with Christopher Lee's *Dracula* via the 1960s Hammer sequels **Dracula Has Risen from the Grave** and **Taste the Blood of Dracula**



Carl Boehm lines up a shot in **Peeping Tom**.

(both Mill Creek), Laird Cregar's tortured serial killer in the atmospheric **Hangover Square** (Kino), the undeservedly obscure and thoroughly trippy Richard Burton thriller **The Medusa Touch** (Hen's Tooth), and **The Purge: Election Year** (Universal Studios), that fear franchise's best entry to date. We also time-traveled back to the '50s for the old-school robot romp **Tobor the Great** (Kino) and the **Twilight Zone**-style fable **The 27th Day** (Mill Creek). We likewise enjoyed several cream-of-the-crime-crop winners like the 1994 neo-noir **China Moon**, Jean Gabin in the 1958 Georges Simenon-drawn **Maigret Sets a Trap** (both Kino), the 1955 heist movie **Violent Saturday** (Twilight Time), featuring an enjoyably unhinged Lee Marvin, plus a pair of obscure '40s noirs found on YouTube, **Apoloogy for Murder** and **The Strange Mrs. Crane**, and climbed back in the couchside saddle for Walter Hill's **The Long Riders**, now out in a bonus-rich double-disc Kino Blu-ray, Arturo Ripstein's newly unearthed 1966 black-and-white Mexican western **Time to Die** (Film Movement Classics), and Burt Lancaster as a vengeful lawman in **Valdez Is Coming** (Kino).

OBIT ORBIT: The Reaper's furiously swinging scythe cut down a slew of showbiz talents since last we convened, claiming, among too many others, Ed Wood veteran and recent *'Scope* interviewee Conrad (**Plan 9 from Outer Space**) Brooks, 86, a truly cool and convivial presence at countless fan conventions over the years. Other departing actors include Bernie (**Dr. Black, Mr. Hyde**) Casey, 78, Don Pedro (**THX-1138**) Colley, 79, Karin (**You Only Live Twice**) Dor, 79, erstwhile sword 'n' sandal mainstay Brad (**The Fury of Hercules**) Harris, 84, John Hillerman, 84, Rance (Father



of Ron and Clint) Howard, 89, Earl Hyman, 91, Anne (**Zombies on Broadway**) Jeffreys, 94, whose amazing career stretched from 1942 (**Billy the Kid Trapped**) to 2013 (TV's **Getting On**), Ray (**Violent City**) Lovelock, 67, Jim (Gomer Pyle) Nabors, 87, and Anne Wedgeworth, 83. On the other side of the lens, we lost directors Umberto (**Nightmare City**) Lenzi, 86, and Ulli (**The Boogeyman**) Lommel, 72, plus cinematographer Harry (**Little Big Man**) Stradling, Jr., 92. The music ranks were hit especially hard with the demise of David Cassidy, 67, white soul king Wayne Cochran, 78, New Orleans legend Fats Domino, 89, rock troubadour Tom Petty, 66, R&B singer/actress Della Reese, 86, and, from the AC/DC universe, two notable brothers, manager and former Easybeats frontman George Young, 70, and guitarist Malcolm Young, 64. All will be missed; fortunately, their readily accessible work lives on.

MONDO KUDOS: Visionary filmmaker George Romero may be gone but his honors continue to accumulate. Along with Criterion's restored, extras-enhanced **Night of the Living Dead** edition (2/18) and Arrow Video's **Between Dead and Dawn** set (11/17), a posthumous Romero star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame was at last awarded in a ceremony held this October past featuring speakers Edgar (**Shaun of the Dead**) Wright and makeup FX ace Greg (**The Walking Dead**) Nicotero. We also congratulate filmmaker Frank Henenlotter, whose 1982 cult classic **Basket Case** was the recent recipient of a Museum of Modern Art film restoration and a 35th anniversary event at MoMA's Manhattan home.

DEPT. OF CORRECTIONS: In our *13 Fave Films of 1967* list last issue (**VS** #104), #13 literally got knocked out of the box. That honor should have gone to Oldrich Lipsky's Czech western spoof **Lemonade Joe** (Facets Video).

A WAKE FOR AWAKENING: Giving the infamous **Zyzzyx Road** (2006), whose theatrical release netted \$30 (!), a run for its pennies is 2017's **Amityville: The Awakening**, whose 9/17 release brought in some \$742 for its producing partner The Weinstein Company. In related news, the reported misadventures of predatory former mogul Harvey Weinstein brings to mind Boris Karloff's line in 1935's **The Raven**: "Maybe if a man is ugly, he does ugly things." We leave you to ponder BK's sagacity. In the meantime, till next time, don't forget to...

Keep watching the screens!



Phantom Pheedback



BY GEORGE!

Phan guys,
I wore my **Night of the Living Dead** tee for a week after George Romero's death. Not one comment. At a supermarket I saw a 30something with a **Walking Dead** tee and asked him if he'd heard the news. He didn't know who Romero was. I told him that if it weren't for Mr. Romero, he'd have no shirt. He didn't find that funny.

The long-gone Bel-Air Drive-in, on 8 Mile Road (unfortunately *not* long-gone), featured a double bill of **Night of the Living Dead** plus **Night of Bloody Horror**. The marquee listed Duane Jones and Judith O'Dea—how I wish I'd taken a picture. One of my very first ozoner visits, and my dad was fine until Gerald McRaney woke up next to his mother.

Enjoyed your [**Night of the Living Dead**] book immensely. You came up with a lot of good stuff. Robert and the Jesters—whoa, would I love to hear them. And as far as I know you're the only one besides myself noticing "Judy's" head on "Helen's" body for that poster. But there were three other little things I'd hoped to see mentioned:

- 1) Early in the first season of **Get a Life**, Chris Elliott's character is talking about something when he says something like "it's like with **Night of the Living Dead**, you know, the old black-and-white one that everybody still talks about."
- 2) The next time you watch **The Player**, pay attention to the introduction of the Lyle Lovett character—he's staggering across a field like the cemetery zombie.
- 3) Also, I'd hoped to find out about "Willard." There was then no Willard, PA. There's a Willard in OH and NY and MD but none near Pittsburgh or Evans City. So how/why did they pick Willard for the rescue center location? Stuff like that gets me.

I was pretty underwhelmed by **Land of the Dead** (and **Bruiser**) but I'll always love the Big 3, plus **Martin**, **The Crazies**, and I think **Monkeyshines** is very good. Your book cheered me up.

Long live George Romero!
—Hugh Shelton, Warren, MI

Thanks for sharing your George Romero memories and insights. We're sure if one compiled all the NOTLD references that have crept into the popular culture over the decades, they could fill another entire volume. With Criterion's new restored NOTLD special edition and Arrow Video's three-film Between Dead and Dawn set, Romero lore continues to proliferate.

6 VideoScope



HIGH TIME

Dear Phantom,
I enjoyed Rob Freese's review of **Horror High** (1973) in **VideoScope** #104. This quirky cult film was also released as **Twisted Brain**, but I much prefer the original title, especially since the picture serves as a time capsule of early 1970s high school culture in terms of fashion, hairstyles, attitudes, etc. While its lack of sex or nudity could almost garner the film a G-rating, the violent scenes of the "Mr. Hyde" incarnation of science nerd Vernon Potts (Pat Cardi) taking revenge on his tormentors are surprisingly graphic for the time. It was given a PG-rating on initial release but, as Freese notes, it is "way stronger for that rating by today's (low-tolerance) standards." **Horror High** is a something of a precursor to **Carrie** as a high school misfit-victim turned supernatural aggressor saga, and in fact captures the teen angst zeitgeist of the era better than its bigger-budget successor. Pat Cardi stated in a 2011 interview that in 1974 Brian De Palma, who was in Texas shooting **Phantom of the Paradise** at the time, saw a cut of **Horror High**. Two years later, De Palma was directing **Carrie**. One of the more memorable **Horror High** characters is Vernon's wicked witch English teacher, Miss Grindstaff (Joy Hash), with her sadistic use of a paper cutter a standout scene. Pat Cardi does a great job as Vernon, with fine supporting work from Rosie Holotik as the potential love interest and Austin Stoker as the cop out to solve the baffling case. Vernon's bullying classmates, led by the low-brow jock Roger (Mike McHenry), have nicknamed him "Creep," which always makes me think of "The Creep" character Rondo Hatton played in **House of Horrors** and **The Brute Man**. Nerdy Vernon Potts may be the most famous (and perhaps only) cinema Creep

since Rondo himself (although there was a later, non-human, monster with a Creeper moniker in **Jeepers Creepers** and its sequels). And like Hatton's Creeper decades earlier, the Vernon Potts Creeper evokes a sense of pathos as well as revulsion for his heinous acts. Continuing the whole "Creep" analogy to a creepy conclusion, the fact that a mainstream critic like Leonard Maltin could give **Horror High/Twisted Brain** the same BOMB rating he would give **The Creeping Terror** shows a lack of understanding of and a disdain for low-budget, unconventional cult films in general.

(Though I am certainly not equating Maltin with a creep, as his compact, text-heavy movie guides were essential reading back in the days before Michael Weldon's **Psycho-tronic Encyclopedia** and **The Phantom of the Movies' VideoScope** came along.) Making the move from Creepers to Silicates, I also enjoyed Freese's review of **Island of Terror**, an old late-night TV favorite of mine.

It's not a Hammer Film, but it sure felt like one back then.

—Timothy Walters, Muskogee, OK

On the topic of Leonard Maltin and peers, a look through most of the vintage film guides reveals a shocking condescension toward and dismissal of quality genre and low-budget fare, with even the best of them were grudgingly judged "good of its kind." Ditto for many magazine and newspaper critics of the day. Early appreciators like James Agee, Manny Farber and Andrew Sarris helped change that perception before hardcore genre boosters like Joe Dante, Michael Weldon, and others all but eradicated that disdainful attitude.

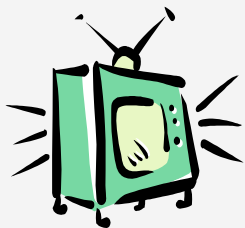
MYSTERY MOVIE

Dear Phantom,
I hate to bother you with this question but I have googled and googled and cannot find the title of the movie I'm looking for. It was reviewed in both of your movie guides. It's a last man on earth type movie and I believe it is an older (70s?) foreign film. A guy builds archaic weapons to try to kill some other guy or creature. I remember that you really liked it. Thanks.
—Brad, via e-mail

Not sure but could it be L.Q. Jones' Harlan Ellison adaptation A Boy and His Dog (1976) or the 1971 Richard Matheson Last Man on Earth re-imagining The Omega Man (1971)?

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The Phantom of the Movies'

NEW RELEASE SHELF

New release titles are followed by year, Phantom rating, director, lead actors, running time (with titles released in separate editions, the running time refers to the Unrated version), DVD and/or Blu-ray label and release date (month and year).

RATINGS KEY

⌘⌘⌘⌘
Couldn't be better

⌘⌘⌘1/2
Excellent

⌘⌘⌘
Good

⌘⌘1/2
Not bad; worth watching

⌘⌘
Mediocre, worthwhile for a particular thesp, director or genre

⌘1/2
Poor but may have points of interest

⌘
Just plain bad

1/2⌘
Even worse than that

O⌘
The pits

N/A
Not available on video

N.I.D.

Not in distribution

Special thanks go to Guidance Ro-Man for his ratings symbol suggestion.



BAD BLOOD: THE MOVIE (2016)⌘1/2

D: Tim Reis. Mary Malloy, Vikas Adam, Troy Halverson, Brian Troxell, Tomi Lavinder, Josh Gould, David Alexander. 80 mins. (Level 33 Entertainment) 1/18

In classic horror movies, scientific experiments went horribly wrong because the scientists were mad. If contemporary American research produces monstrous creatures, blame the foolish researchers who defied official FDA disapproval. College dropout Victoria Miller (Malloy) survives a were-frog (yes, a were-frog!) attack but needs an antidote to prevent her from turning into one herself with the rising of the next full moon. Unfortunately, her clueless suburban Atlanta community views the green substance in the large vial as heroin—with catastrophic results. Writer-director Reis is not a first-rate filmmaking talent, nor does he have access to A-list Holly-

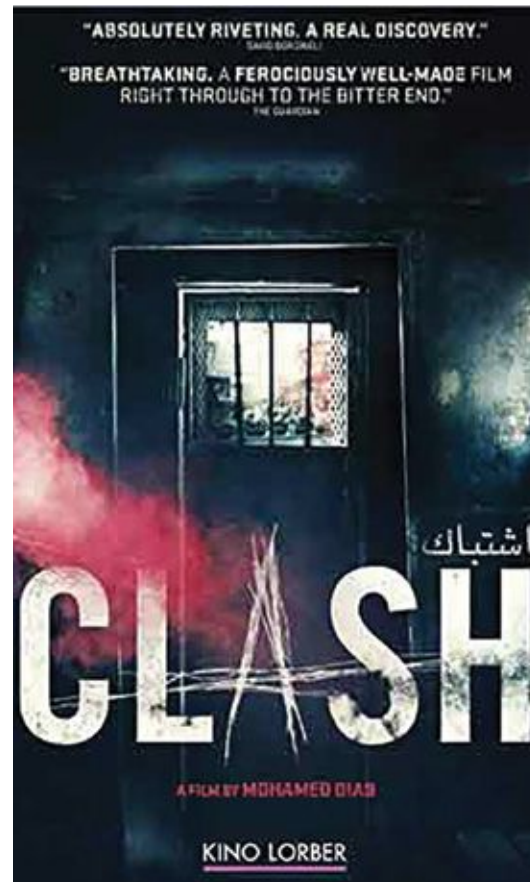
wood actors. His superpower is the ability to use contemporary cultural references to connect with his audience. Victoria complains to her reactionary stepdad, Wade Worthington (Troxell), that he could not understand her situation if he saw it "...on Fox News." Mallory is today's Linda Blair—and not in a good way. **The Exorcist's** young star was possessed by the spirit of Mercedes McCambridge. This DVD's protagonist morphs into Gould, who is credited as "The Frogmonster." Troxell projects a scary credibility as another creature—The Incredible Jerk. Tech geeks may enjoy the 1970 portable color television set that serves as DIY lab equipment. **Bad Blood: The Movie** drags the genre into new territory, one Lon Chaney Jr. and David Naughton doubtless never anticipated.

—Ronald Charles Epstein

CLASH (2016)⌘⌘⌘1/2

D: Mohamed Diab. Nelly Karim, Hani Adel, El Sebali Mohamed, Ahmed Malek, Hosny Sheta, Tarek Abdel Aziz, Ahmed Dash. 97 mins. (Kino Lorber Films) 11/17

A gripping, supremely claustrophobic siege thriller, **Clash** is set in the midst of the Egyptian chaos of 2013 following the end of the Muslim Brotherhood regime. On streets clogged with competing protesters—angry Brotherhood members and their equally agitated opponents—a police van fills with mostly randomly selected people from both sides, along with bystanders, a pair of journalists (one an American citizen), and, later, a dissident soldier. As military personnel wage lethal battle with snipers and rock-throwers outside, hostilities likewise flare within the crowded van. Characters include a young would-be DJ (Egyptian post-teen TV star Malek), a rotund wannabe performer, a hardcore Brotherhood organizer, a teenage girl, a diabetic, and other disparate types all forced to endure the same nightmarish ordeal. The more endangered their common situation becomes, however, the more the detainees begin to band together, though not without ingrained friction frequently intruding. Co-writer (with Khaled Diab)/director Mohamed Diab—aided immensely by cinematographer Ahmed Gabr's ultra-immersive hand-held camerawork and a terrific ensemble cast featuring an especially



standout turn by Karim as Nagwa, a nurse and the only adult woman in the van—captures the intense action, which runs the gamut of human emotions, impulses and activities, from physical violence to acts of mercy to unexpected moments of shared laughter. Diab humanizes even the most unyielding zealots without painting a falsely rosy vision as his wheeled human Petri dish hurtles to its unknown fate. Extras on Kino's DVD include an interesting making-of documentary, which, among other topics, details Diab's difficulty lensing his volatile tale in contemporary Cairo—where at least one scene, staged near a famous city bridge, attracted crowds of actual protesters, resulting in an injured crew member and destroyed vehicle—plus the original theatrical trailer. Though **Clash**, Egypt's 2017 Best Foreign Language Film Oscar submission, flew pretty much under the radar during its extremely limited Stateside theatrical release, it's well worth seeking out on disc.

—The Phantom

HOLLYWOOD VERITE

DAWSON CITY: FROZEN TIME (2016)

8888

D: Bill Morrison. Michael Gates, Kathy Jones-Gates, Sam Kula, Bill O'Farrell, Bill Morrison. 120 mins. (Kino Lorber) 10/17

In 1896 gold was discovered in the Klondike in northwest Canada, and by 1898, 100,000 prospectors had embarked for the port of Skagway, Alaska, then, lugging the required year's amount of food plus supplies (about a ton), the multitude, hunched over, single-file, ascended the forbidding Chilkoot or White Pass Trails (a trek made famous by Charlie Chaplin, who used actual footage of the miners' climb in 1925's *The Gold Rush* [VS #84]). Only 30,000 made it to the trail's end, where they were met by Fred (Frederich) Trump, grandfather of Donald, who amassed the family's fortune transporting the miners' gear to Dawson City. Fifteen to 20 thousand became prospectors and partied hearty with the lucky 4,000 who actually struck gold, in the town's casinos, whorehouses and, yes, movie theater. Dawson City was at the end of the distribution line; it could take two to three years for a film to finally arrive and by then it was out of date. No one wanted it back. The films were stored here and there, with a trove buried in the permafrost beneath a swimming pool turned ice rink. In 1978, Michael Gates was excavating the area where the pool had been and unearthed a cache of over 500 silent films dating from the 1910s to the 1920s—a stunning find, considering that over 75% of all silent films are lost. (The permafrost saved the films from fire and decay but they suffered some water damage.) This suspenseful, haunting, completely captivating and intimate film tells multiple stories about the Gold Rush, the town, resident Indians (relocated, of course, to build Dawson City), silent films (as well as the making of the film stock with the camphor-fueled nitrate that causes them to burn), local and labor movement history, notable personalities and scalawags, and the permanent environmental damage resulting from mechanized mining magically reflected through the flickering snippets of lost/found footage. The Gold Rush was a magnet for hustlers and they're all here, immortalized in Eric Hegg's famed, iconic photography: Alexander Pan-tages who, in the '20s, built a chain of theaters; Sid Grauman, a Dawson City paperboy, of Grauman's Chinese Theater fame; Klondike saloon, hotel and gambling hall owner George Lewis "Tex" Rickard, builder of the third Madison Square Garden and owner of the New York Rangers. Most notable is the mood, driving home the universal folly of humans in all ages (when talkies came in, Dawsonites burned excess silent films and tossed others into the river; in the '70s, a Dawsonite discovered more of Hegg's glass

negatives and asked how to remove the images in order to use the panes in a greenhouse) and the mournful, fleeting passing of time. All this and more in an amazing documentary that is itself mainly a silent film with music.

—Nancy Naglin

HAROLD AND LILLIAN: A HOLLYWOOD LOVE STORY (2015)

8881/2

D: David Raim. Harold Michelson, Lillian Michelson. 94 mins. (Kino) 10/17

A compelling tale of old Hollywood and one of its most industrious couples, *Harold and Lillian* traces the enduring relationship between storyboard artist Harold Michelson and film researcher spouse Lillian. In the beginning, neither seemed destined for Tinseltown careers. Stolid New Yorker Harold, a former WWII fighter pilot, and diminutive, independent-minded Florida-born orphan Lillian (in contemporaneous casting terms, think Walter Matthau and June Foray) met shortly after war's end, when Harold decided to try his luck as a sketch artist. While struggling to support a family that included an autistic son (at a time before that condition was properly identified and treated), Harold gradually landed bigger, if mostly uncredited assignments working on major films like *The Ten Commandments*, *Ben-Hur* and, most significantly, *The Birds*, where the usually anonymous craftsman became Hitchcock's close collaborator. Lillian, meantime, gained an increasingly prominent rep as the go-to researcher for authentic costuming and production design guidance (even consulting with an active drug mogul for tips on proper *Scarface* decor). Whenever his film threatens to bog down in the pair's personal problems, director Raim wisely steers it back to their fascinating professional lives. While the ever-lively Lillian, now 89, handles most of the on-camera narrative chores, she receives talking-head assistance from such prominent industry peers as Mel Brooks, Danny DeVito and Francis Ford Coppola, along with archival comments from her late husband Harold. Withal, *Harold and Lillian* takes us on an extended insider tour spanning some five decades. Extras include the short *Storyboarding The Graduate*, the featurettes *Lillian's Life Lessons* and *Harold's Film School Seminar: Camera Angle Projection*, and deleted scenes.

—The Phantom

THE LOST CITY OF CECIL B. DEMILLE (2016)

8888

D: Peter Brosnan. Peter Brosnan, Agnes DeMille, Cecil B. DeMille, Charlton Heston, Kelvin Jones, Jesse Laskey, Jr., Cecilia DeMille Presley. 88 mins. (Random Media) 7/17

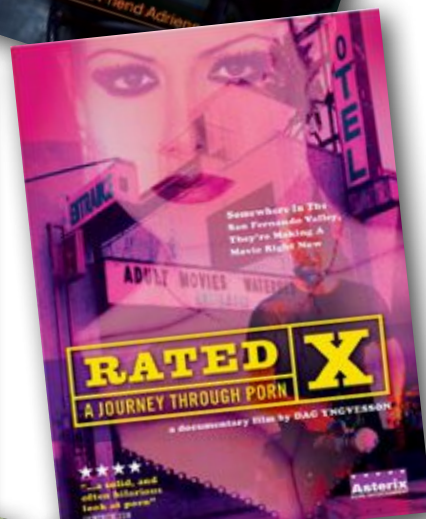
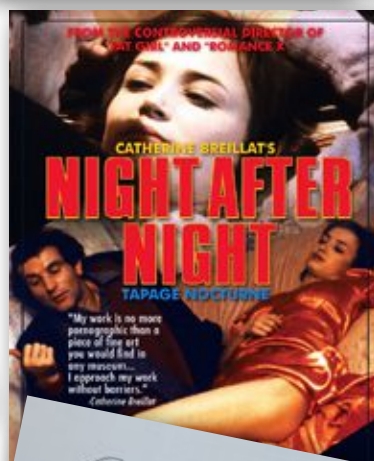
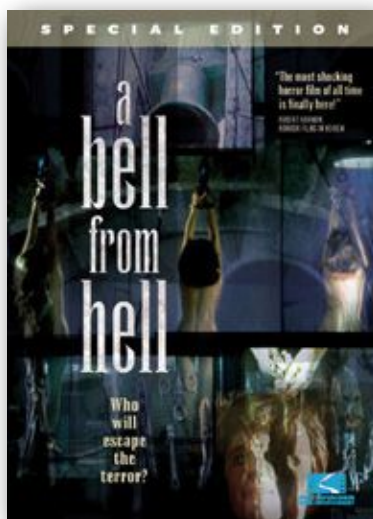
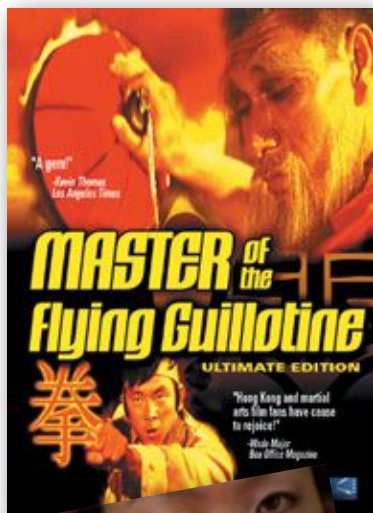
In preparation for the filming of his 1923 silent masterpiece *The Ten Commandments*, Cecil B. DeMille, who only nine years earlier had made the first feature film, *The Squaw Man*, set about building a gargantuan motion picture set (maybe the biggest ever) and constructing two marvels, a



"City of Jerusalem" and an even more amazing "City of Pharaohs," featuring re-created Egyptian motifs with Art Deco overlay inspired by the art of Albrecht Durer, plus sphinxes galore. The City of Jerusalem was later reused for *King Kong*, but what of the City of Pharaohs, especially the sphinxes? According to Jesse Laskey, Jr., a screenwriter, DeMille, fearing his original set would be exploited by rival studios, buried the pharaohs and their sphinxes 150 miles north of Hollywood in the sands of Guadalupe in Santa Barbara County. The sphinxes lay lost and forgotten like the pharaohs of old until 1982, when Brosnan, tantalized by a rumor of their existence, set out to unearth them like Howard Carter discovering King Tut. *The Lost City* is two neatly interwoven, gripping stories: the spirit-crushing indictment of the shameful and idiotic Santa Barbara bureaucrats who thwarted the excavations for more than 30 years and the highly entertaining, fact-filled chronicle showing the nuts and bolts of how DeMille made his two *Commandments*, the second in 1956, rounded out with interviews with former child actors, extras, charioteers, et al. For the 1923 film, DeMille employed 500 carpenters, 400 painters, 1,200 electricians and gardeners, housed in a tent city of 2,500 people consuming 7,500 sandwiches daily and creating four 35-foot high, 35-ton statues of Ramses. Burning through \$40,000 a day (he brought in 300 soldiers to drive the chariots), DeMille likewise rattled studio heads for the '56 exodus extravaganza: 10,000 extras (he hired whole villages), 10,000 animals, 150 second assistant directors. Meanwhile, Brosnan's archeologist quit in despair—he kept filing paperwork; Brosnan got on with his life but he had sphinx fever. Finally, the county relented, a little, and Brosnan, with a new archeologist and limited time and budget, was rewarded with but a single sphinx. Dana Walker, who as a nine-year-old sneaked onto the lot, reveals the secret of the '23 parting of the Red Sea: A 50-foot wide trough filling with jello; the footage was reversed. 8

—Nancy Naglin

"MUST HAVE"



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LONDON HEIST (aka **GUNNED DOWN**) (2015) **881/2**

D: Mark McQueen. Craig Fairbrass, James Cosmo, Mem Ferda, Nick Moran, Steven Berkoff, Nathalie Cox, Frankie Fairbrass. 95 mins. (Lionsgate) 7/17

If you are reviewing the past few days' events in order to find out how you got into your present predicament, you may be in serious trouble. If you are sitting on the Spanish coast, with a blood-spattered bag of looted British pounds, then you're Jack Cregan (Craig Fairbrass), a violent British armed robber. After Cregan's "retirement job" was betrayed, resulting in the loss of his swag and his gangster father Alfie's (Berkoff) murder, he and his wife (Cox) are forced to take refuge in a villa in Marbella, Spain. Its owner, family friend Ray Dickson (Cosmo), touts ambitious plans and hides sinister secrets in a fateful manner. Star and co-scripter Fairbrass sets the almost mindless macho tone, which director McQueen competently animates. His influence can be discerned by watching Berkoff's performance—North Americans know him as **Beverly Hill Cop**'s elegant villain, while Britons are aware of his plays. Here, he is something of a roadshow Junior Soprano. Cosmo steals the show as **O.G.** TV host Dickson because any emotional limitations are offset by the fact that he can play a real scary geezer. McQueen ably evokes London grit and Marbella elegance, establishing the credibility needed to hold audience interest. This feature may attract Berkoff fans and heist-movie junkies; others may prefer to get their U.K. edge from PBS.

—Ronald Charles Epstein

MY JOURNEY THROUGH FRENCH CINEMA (2016) **888**

D: Bertrand Tavernier. Bertrand Tavernier, Thierry Fremaux. 192 mins. (Cohen Media Group) 11/17

Adhering fairly closely to the template established by Martin Scorsese in his Italo cinema valentine **My Voyage to Italy** (VS #53), Bertrand ('**Round Midnight**, **Coup de Torchon**) Tavernier presents a similarly loving, subjective survey of the films that impressed and influenced him from his early movie-going youth in the '40s and '50s through his days as a dedicated cinephile and budding

filmmaker in the '60s and '70s. A genial though not uncritical guide, Tavernier makes both major stops and more obscure detours, celebrating the work of French Bogie Jean (**Touchez Pas au Grisbi**) Gabin and Jean-Paul (**Le Doulos**) Belmondo as well as the American import pulp-movie star Eddie (Lemmy Caution) Constantine. Ditto for directors, with Tavernier singling out lesser lights like Edmond T. (**Noose**) Greville and Jacques (**Dernier Atout**) Becker along with such acknowledged giants as Jean (**Rules of the Game**) Renoir and Francois (**The 400 Blows**) Truffaut. Even when our celluloid tour guide lapses into an occasional dry academic spell, the generous parade of film clips keeps the lengthy documentary alive, with especially generous segments devoted to memorable noirs and thrillers, from Tavernier's personal mentor Jean-Pierre Melville's **Bob La Flambeur** and the Alain Delon showcase **Le Samourai** to Louis Malle's **Elevator to the Gallows**, Claude Chabrol's **Landru** and other crime classics. Viewers may note the absence of faves like Henri-Georges (**Diabolique**) Clouzot and Jules (**Rififi**) Dassin, but this is, after all, Tavernier's personal retrospective, one further bound by a relatively reasonable running time. Regardless of individual taste or interest in French film, few if any movie buffs will leave Tavernier's cinematic seminar sans fresh knowledge and appreciation.

—*The Phantom*

ROBOT WARS (2016) **88**

D: William L. Stewart. Ben Naasz, Teddy Canez, Jennifer Sydney, Faye Kingslee, Aaron Moreland, Javier Calderon, Willie Bingo. 93 mins. (Breaking Glass Pictures) 4/17

Star Wars fans will not go for this title—genre geeks aren't suckers. Robot fans who haven't seen any good films on that subject recently will not be satisfied with a DVD that only features human protagonists. All the humans involved are desperately trying to animate a sci-fi heist-gone-wrong story. In a cosmic dystopia, Billy (Naasz), an imprisoned commando, is offered freedom if he can lead a team to steal a dangerous super-weapon. When a rendezvous with a retrieval craft fails to occur, the crew must survive in a hostile night world. Writer/director Stewart tries to counter the routine plot by dispensing with the opening credits, then configuring the story as an astro-corporate postmortem on a failed mission. Much of this film is viewed on a computerized "starlight scope" monitor. Unfortunately, the director undermines the writer in a manner that turns his novelty into a mere gimmick. Naasz tries to play the rugged action hero, but even men who have never watched a Lifetime Network drama will wonder which one they saw him on. The rest of the cast is equally unfamiliar, yet viewers feel that they may have seen them before, which is not good. Neither is this picture.

—Ronald Charles Epstein



GRUMPY OLD CRITICS
(Say the Darnedest Things)
DEPT.

CLOONEY TUNES
George Clooney's
SUBURBICON

"It's a high-wire storytelling act that's difficult to imagine any director executing appropriately, and Clooney doesn't come remotely close to nailing it."

David Sims
The Atlantic

"Clooney's film telegraphs everything with a beacon, eschewing basic logic, and didn't elicit a single smile, let alone laugh."

Laura Clifford
Reeling Reviews

"The best parts are obviously the Coens and the worst parts are obviously director George Clooney and co-writer Grant Heslov."

Bill Chambers
Film Fresh Central

"Clooney's directorial career has been a bizarre 15-year reverse spiral during which he's somehow managed to unlearn nearly everything about how to make a movie."

Sean Burns
The ARTery

"O George Clooney, where art thou?"
Adam Graham
Detroit News

8

The Phantom's Fave French Crime Films

Elevator to the Gallows (Louis Malle), **Just Before Nightfall** (Claude Chabrol), **Quai des Orfèvres** (Henri-Georges Clouzot), **Rififi** (Jules Dassin), **Breathless** (Jean-Luc Godard), **This Man Must Die** (Chabrol), **Shoot the Piano Player** (Francois Truffaut), **Diabolique** (Clouzot), **Le Circle Rouge** (Jean-Pierre Melville), **Band of Outsiders** (Godard).

RUMBLE: THE INDIANS WHO ROCKED THE WORLD (2017) 8881/2
D: Catherine Bainbridge. 102 mins. (Kino Lorber Films) 10/17

Bainbridge's meticulously assembled, wide-ranging survey traces the history of Native American involvement in the development of rock, folk and blues. Calling on such notable musical spokesfolks as Robbie Robertson (Mohawk) and Buffy Sainte-Marie (who grew up on a Cree reservation in Canada), along with appreciative professional fans like Iggy Stooze and Martin Scorsese, **Rumble** (named in honor of part-Shawnee guitarist Link Wray's pioneering '50s power chord hit, apparently the only instrumental banned for its perceived incendiary effect on incipient juvenile delinquents!) makes an especially strong case for Native American influence on early Southern blues, citing the tribes' frequent intermingling with African Americans in post-slavery days. Delta bluesdom's first vocal and acoustic guitar superstar and prime shaper of future players from Son House to Howling Wolf, Charley (The Father of Delta Blues) Patton (1891-1934), was part Cherokee and frequently employed percussive rhythms clearly Native American in origin (and Bainbridge has the recordings to prove it). **Rumble** also grants overdue attention to big band blues and jazz singer Mildred Bailey, who drew on her Native American roots for musical cues. While only a handful of First Nations musicians, most famously Redbone ("Come and Get Your Love") performed specifically Native American acts, many more proved integral to mainstream rock, from guitar ace Jesse Ed Davis to heavy metal drummer Randy Castillo. Bainbridge and her witnesses likewise point out how primarily African American identified Jimi Hendrix's Native American heritage threaded its way through numbers like "Little Wing" and "I Don't Live Today." While detailing the largely victimized history of the sundry tribes, Bainbridge succeeds in avoiding an academic approach, keeping her focus firmly on the music. On another musical note, Criterion Collection issues a new Blu-ray edition of Murray Lerner's invaluable documentary **Festival**, assembled from four Newport Folk Festivals (1963-1966), capturing indelible performances by Bob Dylan (including his then-controversial electric conversion), Joan Baez, Peter, Paul and Mary, Johnny Cash, and Howling Wolf (whose "Moanin' at Midnight" audio was lost, replaced here by an obvious studio recording), among many more, along with a host of extras, from bonus performances to interviews to making-of footage.

WIND RIVER (2017) 888

D: Taylor Sheridan. Jeremy Renner, Elizabeth Olsen, Graham Greene, Kelsey Asbille, Gil Birmingham, Austin Grant. 107 mins. (Lionsgate) 11/17

As in his previous contempo western **Hell or High Water** (VS #101), writer/director Sheridan's latest backwater crime drama, **Wind River**, focuses on desperate, destitute people stuck in remote impoverished American West hellholes. In the desert-set **Hell or High Water** (Sheridan seems to be running through the elements—look for fire on the horizon), rural white Texas brothers strapped for cash and stripped of hope went the armed robbery route with lawmen Jeff Bridges and Gil Birmingham in literally hot pursuit. Here, the climate changes to a frigid Wyoming winter icescape, where local great white hunter Cory (Renner) and tribal cop Ben (Greene) attempt to solve the mysterious death of teenage Native American girl Natalie (Asbille), found frozen in the snow. Filling the fish-out-of-water part is Vegas-based FBI agent Jane Banner (Olsen), whose earnest but inexperienced presence fails to raise hopes for closure and justice. Since **Wind River** follows a winding procedural path, to reveal much more would risk giving too much of the investigatory game away. Suffice it to say that marksman Cory is recruited to play an active role, both as amateur detective and avenger via a promise made to Natalie's grief-numbed father Martin (Birmingham). Ultra-grim but undeniably gripping and punctuated by loud bursts of surprisingly vicious violence, **Wind River** starts and ends in the same place **Hell and High Water** took viewers: hopelessness. Along the way, Sheridan earns kudos for employing one of the most effective uses of flashback we've ever witnessed, while an ever-dependable Renner and Greene head a credible mixed Anglo and Native American cast, and atmospheric filmmaker/composer Nick Cave returns to again handle score chores. Despite a couple of missteps (including a gratuitous early-reel shootout) and one consistently glaring omission (we never see the participants' breath in the oft-cited near-zero weather), **Wind River** reps a trip worth taking. Extras on Lionsgate's Blu-ray include deleted scenes and a behind-the-scenes video gallery.

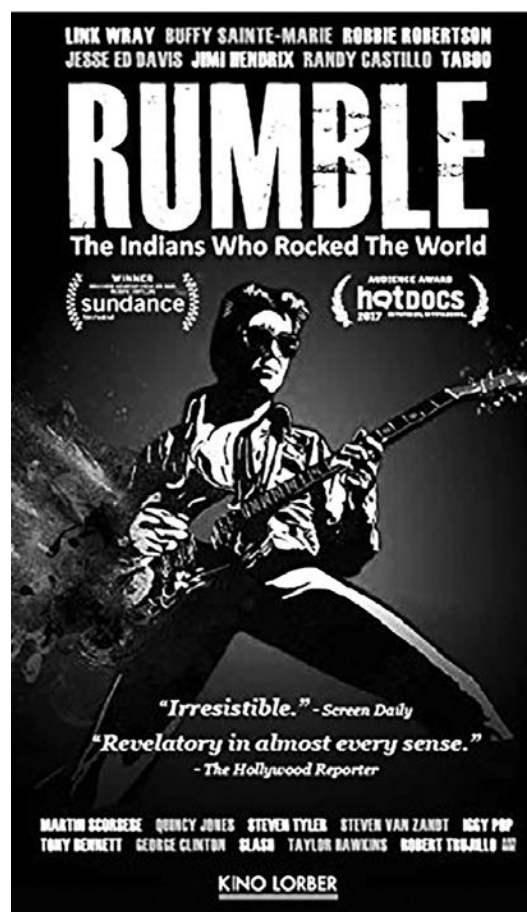
—*The Phantom*

Phantom Phlashboard

FIRST NATIONS EXPLOITATION!

JOHNNY FIRECLOUD (1975) 888
D: William A. Castleman. Victor Mohica, Ralph Meeker, Frank DeKova, Sacheen Littlefeather, David Canary, Christina Hart. 97 mins. (Something Weird Video)

In what's widely considered the late, great David F. (The Mighty Monarch of Exploitation) Friedman's most mainstream movie, Mohica plays the eponymous character (named after a desert atomic test blast), a post-Billy Jack, pre-Rambo Native American 'Nam vet who encounters big-



otry and injustice in the modern West, most egregiously in the form of big-shot racist rancher Colby (former Mike Hammer Meeker) and his redneck goons. Johnny also spends much screen time engaging in an ongoing debate with his tradition-bound grandfather White Eagle (DeKova). When the latter insists that Johnny's reservation home is "full of rich heritage," our hero retorts, "It's full of bugs!" Boldly declaring that "tradition is still like always," White Eagle dons his tribal gear, attempts a meeting with the vicious Colby, and winds up getting lynched for his troubles. Colby's minions further up the ante by raping schoolteacher Nanya (erstwhile Marlon Brando protege Littlefeather), setting the stage for Firecloud's requisite last-reel revenge spree. It's here that the flick hits its sadistic stride, as Johnny employs venerable Native American means to gore-slaughter the bad guys, scalping one, eliminating another with a venomous snake, staking yet a third to an anthill, and otherwise putting tradition to creative use. **Johnny Firecloud** by no means marked the last of Mohica, who also starred in **Ghost Dance** and had smaller roles in the slasher tale **Don't Answer the Phone** (Vinegar Syndrome), the big-budget sci-fi time-travel adventure **The Final Countdown** (Blue Underground), and the western **Showdown**, among others, in a career that extended into the 1990s. If you only manage one Mohica movie, though, we'd strongly urge you to make it **Johnny Firecloud**. SWV's double-bill DVD includes Castleman's cautionary rock fable second feature **Bummer!** 8

BEST OF THE FESTS: POPCORN FRIGHTS

By Joseph Perry

Popcorn Frights Film Festival, billed as Florida's largest horror/genre movie fest, held its third annual outing in Miami from August 11–17. Festival co-directors Igor Shteyrenberg and Marc Ferman curated a remarkable selection of films that made it easy to see why this festival is growing more popular each year. Popcorn Frights 2017 boasted 20 features and plenty of short films, screened at the nonprofit, independent O Cinema.

My favorite of the Popcorn Frights films I caught is **It Stains the Sands Red** (MPI). As someone who became burned out on zombie fare several years ago, I can highly recommend director Colin Minihan's gripping, often poignant movie as a decidedly unique offering. Brittany Allen stars as Molly, a troubled Las Vegas showgirl, single mom, and substance abuser who finds herself stranded in the desert with a lone zombie (Juan Riedinger) hot on her trail. Allen absolutely shines in this role and is reason enough to seek out this film. She is on screen for most of the running time and has the opportunity to show a wide range of emotions as her character goes from dealing with a stranded car and an unsympathetic boyfriend to fighting for her life against both the ever-present zombie and the cruelties the desert presents. This original film is loaded with surprises and offers startling horror, well-timed humor, and even heart-wrenching drama. Minihan wrote the screenplay with Stuart Ortiz. The two were formerly known as the Vicious Brothers, and their past work includes **Extraterrestrial** (2014 [Shout!], also with Allen) and **Grave Encounters** (2011 [Tribeca], which featured Reidinger).

Director/co-writer (with Colin Minihan) Brandon Christensen's **Still/Born** (Canada, 2017) is a supernatural horror film starring Christie Burke as Mary, a young mother who lost one of her twin sons at birth. Her husband Jack (Jesse Moss) tries to continue chasing big business deals to pay for their new home, while Mary sinks further into postpartum problems. She believes the dead son is taking up residence in the nursery, but her suspicions descend into paranoia as she delves deeper into what she discovers is truly happening—or is it? Christensen's chiller starts out gripping but displays some minor flaws in the second and third acts, with the plot taking a turn from one sinister possibility to a more standard one. The stars and

supporting cast are quite good, though Burke's performance walks a fine line between nail-biting and scenery chewing as her character slips further into madness. **Still/Born** was the runner-up for Popcorn Fright's Audience Award, won by director Joe Lynch's highly acclaimed thriller **Mayhem**.

With all of the talk from different characters in **The Bride** (Russia, 2017) about how weddings “in the old days” were thought of as a kind of death for the bride when she leaves her family for a new one, and how evil spirits and family ghosts were involved with brides and grooms to be, it's a wonder that anyone ever got married in Russia after the 1830s, when the opening sequence for this film takes place. After that cautionary scene setting up the history of an eerie entity called “Mother,” the rest of the film unfolds in contemporary times and loses impact in its telling of a young bride's nightmarish first visit with her new in-laws. Seasoned fright-fare fans will have seen it all before, from the jerky movement that is decades-old in Japanese horror, to the present day's cliched screaming CGI faces. **The Bride** is well shot and acted, though, with a sense of gloom lurking throughout, and the camera loves topline Victoria Agalakova. What gives the film a unique spin and a reason to recommend it is the Russian take on the rather predictable plot. Until the climactic sequence, the film depends on loud noises and other jump scares. When the finale kicks in, people finally die, but that's a long time to wait for anything of note to happen.

Game of Death (France/Canada/USA, 2017) has some decent ideas neutered by mostly unlikable characters who make the first 10 minutes of its lean 73-minute running time excruciating. I couldn't tell whether co-directors/co-writers Sebastien Landry and Laurence Morais-Lagace and co-writer Edouard H. Bond (Philip Kalin-Hajdu receives an “adapted by” credit as well) were trying to send up millennials or if this was supposed to be what they perceived as non-satirical realism. After the initial party scene featuring drugs, alcohol, and sex with clothes on, things pick up when the titular animated board game is introduced. The rules are simple: the assembled friends must kill a total of 24 people within short time limits or their own heads will explode, one by one (shades of the James Gunn-scripted **The Belko Experiment** [VS #104]). Though the film peripherally raises some Ethics 101 questions as surviving members try to figure out which strangers to off, it feels mostly like a glorified proof of concept for its talented special effects crew, with bucket-loads of blood, entrails, and bits of brain on copious display. Though the characterization improves to varying degrees after the opening sequence, overall **Game of Death** seems more like an extended short that could have used some more cutting.



A delightfully offbeat fantasy-comedy, **Dave Made a Maze** (Gravitas) riffs on horror and adventure films, offering some suspense and chills along with a healthy dose of laughter. Actor Bill (Ouija) Watterson's directorial debut sees frustrated artist Dave (Nick Thune) become lost in a cardboard fort he built in the apartment he shares with girlfriend Annie (Meera Rohit Kumbhani). Dave's friend Gordon (Adam Busch) comes over to help, inviting along filmmaker Harry (James Urbaniak) and his crew, and, against Dave's pleading, a group of partygoers enters the cardboard construction. As everyone soon discovers, the fort houses a huge, mystical maze in which danger lurks around every corner. Members of the group meet their demises in ways that will delight fright-film fans, with whimsical surprises standing in for traditional blood and gore effects. The results are simultaneously hilarious and chilling. All involved show a great deal of imagination and effort bringing to life the riotous world that Watterson and his co-writer Steven Sears have conceived. The maze is a character unto itself. The talented ensemble cast knows comic timing and is equally adept during dramatic moments. This fun outing is one of the most unique, big-hearted films of the year.

Other Popcorn Frights highlights included U.S. premieres of two Canadian efforts, the creature-feature comedy sequel **Another Wolfcop** and the zombies vs. kids zomcom **Dead Shack**; the North American premieres of the supernatural suspenser **The Hatred** (Lionsgate) and the home invasion/evil cult shocker **Jackals** (Shout! Factory); and the final cut premiere of the killer-clown flick **Terrier**. ✂

MONDO ROMERO!

GEORGE A. ROMERO: BETWEEN NIGHT AND DAWN

(\$99.95, 6-disc Blu-ray Arrow Video) 11/17

Arrow's invaluable set assembles the three feature films George Romero directed between 1968's **Night of the Living Dead** and 1978's **Dawn of the Dead** (more accurately between **Night** and 1976's **Martin**, which will hopefully surface as a future Blu-ray). The third film, the classic 1973 paranoid thriller **The Crazies** was reviewed earlier (**VS** #27) and, with its 2009 remake, served as the subject of a Tim Ferrante and Scott Voisin *Split Screen* column (**VS** #82), so the focus here is on the set's more elusive titles, 1971's **There's Always Vanilla** and 1972's **Season of the Witch** (aka **Jack's Wife**).

THERE'S ALWAYS VANILLA (1971) 88 1/2

D: George Romero. Ray Laine, Judith Ridley, Johanna Lawrence, Richard Ricci, Roger McGovern, Ron Jaye. 93 mins.

After completing **Night**, Romero gravitated to the wannabe hip and happening "youth" drama **There's Always Vanilla** (aka **The Affair**), a feature-length expansion of a half-hour black-and-white film, **At Play with the Angels**, starring Ray Laine and written and directed by Romero cohort Rudy Ricci. In **Vanilla**, Laine topline as Chris, a typically smug, perpetually amused '60s musician/slacker (with a rich dad) and a chronic sufferer of what used to be known back in the day as Elliot Gould Syndrome (a thankfully since-cured malaise)—he's the only one who, with his built-in BS detector and psychological X-ray vision, can clearly perceive modern life's myriad hypocrisies and absurdities (you know, or probably once knew, the type). Romero opens the film with a lyrical, if clichéd image of two colorful balloons free-floating against an azure sky set to the strains of "Wild Mountain Thyme." We almost immediately crash to Earth, zeroing in on urban gawkers surrounding an alfresco device called the Ultimate Machine, an elaborate, expensive Rube Goldberg-style contraption that appears to serve no useful purpose, a metaphor for encroaching corporate culture and its manufactured consumerism. Chris then addresses the camera, as he does at arbitrary intervals throughout the film, to share his faux-hippie free-spirit observations. The movie soon morphs into sort of a Pittsburgh-placed **Darling** with the introduction of foxy commercial model Lynn (**Night**'s doomed ingenue Ridley under her married name Judith Streiner), first seen on the hectic set of a fantasy-enhanced beer ad. Chris and Lynn, who radiates a bit of a homegrown Brigitte Bardot vibe, quickly connect for a fling that runs the gamut from

groovy romantic montages to a harrowing sequence in an illicit abortionist's office (complete with a cameo by **Night**'s erstwhile Sheriff McClelland, George Kosana, as a scary medical henchman). Along the way, Romero displays his considerable cinematic skills with imaginative shots and ironic touches but overall seems to be borrowing, liberally and ill-advisedly, from John Cassavetes' muse. Today, **Vanilla** succeeds more as a regional time capsule—for starters, it's the only pic to proffer a whirlwind inside tour of the Steel City advertising world—than a compelling film in its own right, though it certainly rates a look for armchair counter-culture historians as well as Romero completists. Arrow extras include **Affair of the Heart: The Making of There's Always Vanilla**, a new documentary with actors Ridley and Ricci, producers John Russo and Russ Streiner and soundman Gary Streiner; an audio commentary by Travis Crawford; **Digging Up the Dead: The Lost Films of George A. Romero**, an archival interview with Romero discussing **Vanilla** and **Season of the Witch**; a location gallery, and more.

SEASON OF THE WITCH (aka JACK'S WIFE) (1972) 88 1/2

D: George Romero. Jan White, Bill Thunhurst, Ray Laine, Joedda McClain, Ann Muffly, Neil Fisher. 90 mins.

Following **Vanilla**, Romero scripted, directed, shot (in 16mm, later blown up to 35mm) and edited **Jack's Wife** (1972). A raw but frequently effective fable, the film deals with the mental meltdown of Joan Mitchell (not to be confused with Joni), an upper-class, early middle-aged woman (soap opera actress White in a bravura performance), something of a variation on **Night**'s Helen Cooper (Marilyn Eastman) a rung or two up the social ladder and a few years down the road. Alienated from her husband Jack (Thunhurst) and prattling femme friends, deserted by her runaway college-age daughter Nikki (McClain) and engaged in an ill-advised affair with the latter's snarky, head games-playing sometimes boyfriend Greg (Laine), Joan seeks release by drifting into amateur witchcraft. Driven by simultaneously harrowing and ironic (and often brilliant) symbol-laden dream sequences, frequent extreme close-ups and intense confrontational acting, the picture is, like **Vanilla**, more reminiscent of John Cassavetes' **Faces**—with a dash of Bergman-style depression and a pinch of Felliniesque surrealism—than **Rosemary's Baby**. That Roman Polanski chiller, then (and still) the yardstick for witchcraft films, even receives an onscreen reference, as does **The Graduate**, with Greg calling Joan "Mrs. Robinson." Powerful, even profound images abound. Greg's humiliation of Joan's loud, tipsy friend Shirley (Muffly), tricked into believing she's smoking her first joint, is almost too uncomfortably real to endure. Two nightmare segments likewise stand out. One is the film's opening sequence, when Joan is led Svengali-like by a casually callous Jack through autumnal woods, where sharp, bare branches slap and slash her face, on



the way to their ultimate destination: Joan's outdoor kennel (!). Another heart-racing dream sees Joan pursued through her house by a hideously masked killer (**Night**'s cemetery zombie Bill Hinzman, again in a menacing mode). In an earlier fantasy scene, a slick salesman leads Joan on a tour of her own barren existence, including a mirror that shows a reflection of an old lady Joan. This heady and horrific material is partially undermined by some uneven acting and persistent pacing problems. Although far more of an artistic success than **Vanilla**, **Jack's Wife** experienced similar budgetary woes. As Romero once commented: "Not only did it suffer from being a \$250,000 movie, but it suffered from being a \$250,000 movie that had to get made for a hundred grand! The differences between this and **Rosemary's Baby** are vast in terms of just execution. But thematically it's there. **Jack's Wife** was really sort of a feminist picture. The beginning days of women's liberation, and so forth. Even though I wrote it, I wrote it based on the feelings and observations of some female friends of mine." With its paucity of true horror overtones (although the filmmaker incorporates a neat **Night** nod with a comic "zombie" moment in Jack and Joan's bedroom), the movie, like **Vanilla**, presented a major marketing problem. Distributor Jack H. (The Blob) Harris ultimately reedited the film with radical cuts and tried to disguise it as an erotic exploitation venture under the dubious moniker **Hungry Wives**, but that likewise failed to fly. The film eventually surfaced on VHS in 1985 as **Season of the Witch** (with Donovan's titular tune on the soundtrack); that misleading title disappointed fright fans looking for a jolt of anticipated Romero madness a la **Night**. Extras include **Season's** alternate 104-minute extended version; a Travis Crawford commentary; an interview with Romero by filmmaker/fan Guillermo del Toro; an archival interview with Jan White, and more. 8

—The Phantom

Rob Freese's
BEST OF THE
SPAGHETTI WEST

ARROW VIDEO

(\$29.98 2-disc Blu-ray) 4/17

DJANGO PREPARE A COFFIN (1968)

8881/2

D: Ferdinando Baldi. Terence Hill, Horst Frank, George Eastman, Jose Torres, Pinuccio Ardia, Guido Lollobrigida. 92 mins.

After *Django* (Hill) is set up by crooked politician David Barry (Frank), he is left for dead and his wife is killed by Barry's henchman Lucas (Eastman). Years later, *Django*, assumed deceased since there is a grave marker in the cemetery bearing his name, is covertly working as a hangman, going from town to town to execute men wrongfully accused by Barry so he can steal their land. *Django* does not actually kill the men; he provides harnesses to make it look like they're hanged, then drags off the "dead" body for burial. In exchange for saving their lives, *Django* enlists the men to form a phantom posse of vigilantes to ride against Barry and raise hell with those who wrongfully accused them. A wagon full of bank funds complicates matters as the vigilantes stray from their mission, obstructing *Django*'s efforts to avenge his wife's murder. This is one of the best of the many, many "Sons of *Django*" films that galloped across the screen after the success of Sergio Corbucci's original *Django* in 1966. Part of this is due to the fact that *Django Prepare a Coffin* was conceived as an actual sequel to the Corbucci film, with original star Franco Nero planning to return to portray the gunslinger he made famous. When Hollywood called, Nero took the first plane to the States and the very capable Hill stepped in to perform *Django* duties. He's a great match for Nero and gives the character his own touches without veering too far from the original. There are a number of exciting surprises along the way, including an insane fire gag that will make your skin crawl. Extras include liner notes, trailer, and *Django Explained*, a short history of *Django* on film from spaghetti western expert Kevin Grant. This is an explosive great time that delivers the six-shooter goods.

WILD EAST PRODUCTIONS

(\$19.98 DVD) 4/17

RAMON THE MEXICAN (1966)

D: Maurizio Pradeaux. Robert Hundar (Claudio Undari), Vilma Lindamar, Jean Louis, Joes Torres, Luciano Rossi, Giovanna Lenzi. 92 mins.

The action starts when Esmeralda (Lindamar) is attacked at a river by scummy

Juan Morales. Slim Baxter (Louis) ends the assault by filling Juan's belly with lead. Ramon Morales (Undari/Hundar) vows to avenge his brother's death and starts by bullying the sheriff into letting him handle it his own way, then gunning down Slim's father in cold blood. When Slim approaches Ramon, he is shot and left for dead. Esmeralda swears to become Ramon's wife after she nurses Slim back to health, hoping that will cease the killing. Once Slim begins feeling fidgety, he blows away some of Ramon's men and tells a survivor to let Ramon know he's coming for him. Ramon retaliates by killing more of Slim's family. Slim hangs out with a rough crowd and learns to be quicker on the draw, thanks to a nut with an axe. He finally heads into town for his final confrontation with Ramon. Unfortunately, this early spaghetti western suffers from having a hero and a villain that are so unappealing it's hard for the viewer to care about either one of them. The lily-livered sheriff is no help either. In fact, there's really no one worth rooting for except for a funny old man who seems to play both sides of the fence, which makes him not very appealing either. There is one silly but fun scene with a wagon and a keg of gunpowder straight out of a Bugs Bunny cartoon that generates a real laugh. I'm sure it has its fans, but I found *Ramon* lacking in genuine sagebrush thrills.

CALIFORNIA (1977)

D: Michele Lupo. Giuliano Gemma, William Berger, Miquel Bose, Chris Avram, Paolo Dominguin, Robert Hundar (Claudio Undari), Raimund Harmstorf. 100 mins.

After the Civil War, Confederate soldiers are set free to return home and resume their lives. Michael "California" Random (Gemma) heads back to Missouri, but young Willy Preston (Bose) tries to talk the older soldier into accompanying him to his home in Georgia. Michael reluctantly travels with Willy but is always looking for an opportunity to dump his motor-mouthed companion. Meanwhile, bounty hunter Rope Whitaker (Harmstorf) leads his men in rounding up Confederate criminals for the Union in the most brutal fashion. When Willy is murdered by a grief-stricken Northern father who lost his son, Michael feels it's his responsibility to travel to Willy's parents' homestead and deliver the news. When he arrives, he is coerced into staying a while by Willy's attractive sister Helen (Dominguin, Bose's real sister). The Prestons take a liking to Michael and he becomes comfortable in his new surroundings. But when Helen is abducted by Rope, Michael goes into full-blown vengeance mode. Arriving toward the end of the spaghetti western cycle, *California* is a fantastic action flick that is amusing in parts (such as when men jump wildly in a swamp trying to collect a bullfrog dinner) and straight-up brutal in others. Multiple bullet wounds (courtesy of old-school squibs) will grab your attention and



Gianni Ferri's synthesizer-driven score lends the film a modern edge. Gemma (also known as Montgomery Wood) plays it straight, without his customary goofy farm-boy charm, but is still as likable as ever. Instead, Bose takes over in the goofy farm-boy department and is delightful. Dominguin is fetching and plays her role well, becoming a shattered version of her former self after her abduction. Regular viewers of Spaghetti Cinema will no doubt recognize Romano Puppo as one of Rope's henchmen; he played in other classic Italian flicks like *After the Fall of New York*, *Escape from the Bronx* and *The Great Alligator*, among many others. It wasn't enough to breathe new life into the then-tired genre, but this is a solid, satisfying entry and fans would do well to scope it out. Both films are excellently remastered and presented in widescreen. Extras include a trailer for *California*, picture galleries and a Robert Hundar trailer gallery.

REST OF THE WEST

Elsewhere on the western front, Kino Lorber unleashes a gala double-disc edition of Walter Hill's classic account of the James Gang's exploits, *The Long Riders* (1980), cast with four famous brother acts (the Carradines, the Keaches, the Guests, and the Quaid) and packed with bonus material galore, from commentaries to interviews to featurettes and more. The same label issues Sergio Corbucci's excellent *The Mercenary*, with Franco Nero and Tony Musante, along with George Peppard in *Cannon for Cordoba*, both set in early 20th century Mexico, and Giulio Petroni's Lee Van Cleef showcase *Death Rides a Horse* (\$29.95 each Blu-ray). Warner Archive goes the Blu-ray route with the solid 1958 sagebrush adventure *The Law and Jake Wade* (\$21.95), starring Richard Widmark and Robert Taylor as sworn antagonists.

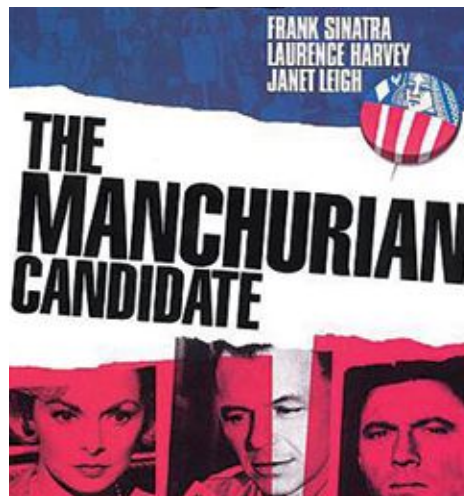
SPLIT SCREEN

Axes and Picks with VS Critic
Tim Ferrante & Scott Voisin

'Scope scribes Scott Voisin and Tim Ferrante engage in a wintry wrestle comparing John Frankenheimer's chilling **The Manchurian Candidate** (1962) and Jonathan Demme's 2004 remake.

Tim Ferrante: Staff Sergeant Raymond Shaw (Laurence Harvey) is the stepson of a United States senator and a domineering mother whose relationship with her son seems a little *too* close. He's just been awarded the Medal of Honor for his Korean War valor. Raymond saved the lives of his embattled platoon and led them back to friendly territory. They all agree that Sergeant Shaw is a hero and one of the finest men they've ever met. The truth? They were captured and sent to Manchuria in communist China by the Soviets. Following three days of intensive brainwashing, the programmed platoon was released where fellow soldiers could find them to retell the epic story of Sergeant Shaw's fictional bravery. Shaw's Washington connection makes him an invaluable operative, especially since his rewiring was the most concentrated and insidious. The original **The Manchurian Candidate** follows Richard Condon's 1959 novel rather closely. Co-producer/scripter George Axelrod preserved its raw and sinister clime whilst partner John Frankenheimer delivered a marvelously directed widescreen thriller. Jonathan Demme's remake is very entertaining, but it lacks the icy political atmosphere and tone of the original.

Scott Voisin: There's no doubt Frankenheimer's **Candidate** is a first-rate flick held in deservedly high regard, but for my money, Demme delivered the superior take on the story. Unlike most Hollywood re-do's, this new and improved version is a wonderfully delicate balancing act that pays generous respect to its predecessor while successfully expanding and updating the themes to make it relevant for modern audiences. The original has Sgt. Shaw as an unwitting assassin with no memory of the crimes he's summoned to commit, but the reboot positions the character as a Congressman chosen to be the nominee for Vice President. I think you'd agree that a conditioned killer can do a lot of damage, but a brainwashed VP can do a helluva lot more! And instead of a foreign enemy turning our soldiers against us, Demme posits that a shadowy corporation in our own country is at the heart of the political conspiracy (sadly, an idea that doesn't seem too far-fetched in this day and age). These are just two examples of taking the dated source material and introducing elements that raise the cinematic stakes considerably.



TF: The remake doesn't raise the cinematic stakes. It merely calls them. I expected the updating and character adjustments and, frankly, it's easy to enjoy because Demme is a terrific director and is working with top-tier performers and craftspeople who totally bring their game. I dislike the remake's "bad guy" substitution. Switching the origin of the scheme from clearly portrayed enemy madmen to "a shadowy corporation in our own country." It distills the emotional reaction toward the entity behind it all. Making some dark corporation with crackpot functionalities as the main menace turns it into an almost abstract foe. Corporations as antagonists rarely impress me because it's a lazy bad-guy crutch in my mind. It's valid but far less effective than showing twisted foreign leaders meeting, plotting and infiltrating our government. They're clearly defined and tangible characters that create a visceral reaction. Who doesn't want to deck Khigh Dhiagh as the charmingly irritating Yen Lo? Yes, upping Raymond Shaw's position to VP nominee adds a little weight to the threat but is equally diminished by the script's updated threat that wants him there.

SV: I'm sure there's supposed to be a point buried under that mountain of words, but since I'm not an archaeologist, let's just move on... One of the great changes Demme and his writers incorporated was telling the tale primarily from the point of view of fellow soldier Ben Marco (Denzel Washington, taking over for Frank Sinatra). In the original, Shaw and Marco shared a nearly equal amount of screen time, but reimagined as a vehicle for Washington, we are put into the capable hands of one of the best actors of his—or any—generation as he guides us through the plot's paranoid political labyrinth. By reducing Shaw (well played by Liev Schreiber) to a supporting character, there's an air of much-needed mystery surrounding him that never existed before. Another update that brings the story into the 21st century is the explanation of how Shaw and his platoon became puppets of the enemy in the first place. Rather than attributing their unpatriotic behavior to psychological "brainwashing," it's revealed that microchips have been implanted in them, a conceit that requires far less suspension of disbelief.



TF: Your smart-ass remark aside, the shifting of weight from Shaw to Marco fiddled where none was needed. The remake removes some of the very aspects that propel the original's Shaw. He's an unwitting tool, an acerbic, unlikable type *and* a sympathetic main character. He murders the woman he unreservedly loves (not to mention four others) thanks to his rewiring. The finale of a son killing his mother has far more melodramatic impact and displays a cruel—yet just—irony that's missing from the remake. And snapping Sinatra's Marco out of much of his brainwashing provides a necessary solid character base amid a swirl of confused participants. Yet we're unnerved when he still goes automaton when asked his opinion of Raymond Shaw: "Raymond Shaw is the kindest, bravest, warmest, most wonderful human being I've ever met in my life." He knows the opposite is true! The remake instead portrays Shaw as a nice guy, thus removing any dramatic punch from identical scenes. The remake's adaptation strips the original of layers of intrigue, subtexts and superior character complexities.

SV: I'll concede there are a few instances where the remake fails to live up to its predecessor (aside from the stuff you just mentioned, which is utter nonsense). The biggest standout is the portrayal of Shaw's domineering mother, played by Angela Lansbury and Meryl Streep, respectively. As someone who grew up only knowing her as the loveable sleuth Jessica Fletcher in **Murder, She Wrote**, I thought Lansbury's performance a revelation as the ruthless and domineering matriarch. Conversely, being an avid admirer of Streep's amazing work over the years, I found her rendition to be underwhelming and disappointing. There's no lack of effort, but she seems more concerned with doing her best Hillary Clinton impersonation than serving her character's purpose in the story. Shaw's rekindled relationship with his former flame is also a missed opportunity, wasting the talented Vera Farmiga in a cameo that lacks the emotional payoff shown in the original. In a perfect world, the best elements from both films would be utilized to create a true masterpiece, but until that day comes, both **Candidates**—regardless of their flaws—are worth endorsing. ✕

Rob Freese's EUROCRIME REPORT

ARROW VIDEO

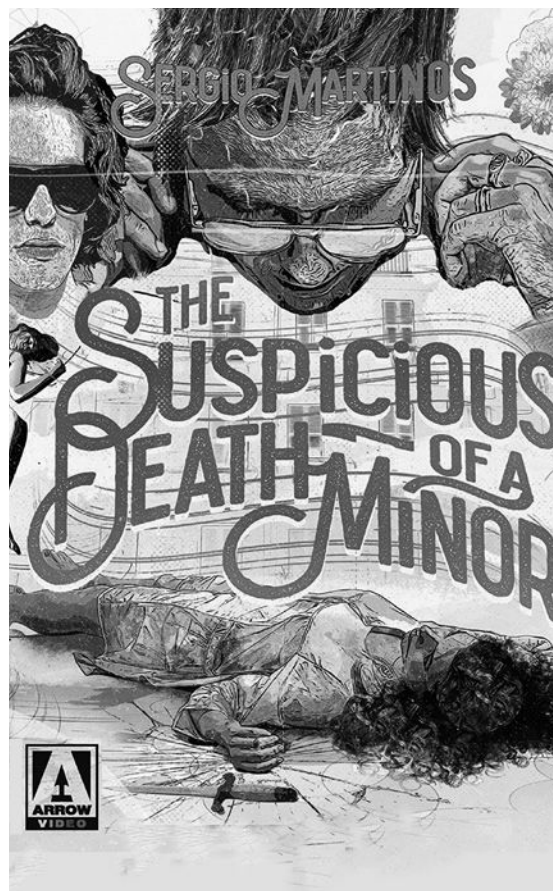
(\$39.95 Blu-ray) 10/17

THE SUSPICIOUS DEATH OF A MINOR (1975) ♂♂♂

D: Sergio Martino. Claudio Cassinelli, Mel Ferrer, Lia Tanzi, Gianfranco Barra, Adolfo Caruso, Jenny Tamburi. 100 mins.

Paolo Germi (Cassinelli) tries to pick up a girl on the run from a stranger in mirror sunglasses and gets his own spectacles broken when she makes a quick exit. She is soon murdered, and Germi teams up with Gianni (Caruso), a petty thief, to snatch purses from streetwalkers. He lets the kid have all the money in the purses; all he wants are the little black books of names and addresses. After a long car chase that includes a number of oddly incongruous bits of slapstick comedy (such as a car crashing into the front of a bicycle and turning it into a unicycle), it is revealed that Germi is actually a police detective on an undercover operation investigating kidnapped children. A number of recent snatchings have something to do with a number of recent murders, and Germi is under pressure from his superintendent (Ferrer) to provide some arrests. The closer Germi gets to revealing the truth, the closer the man in the mirror sunglasses gets. A fistful of twists and a handful of turns take the story through one loop after another, revealing blackmail, narcotics and assault. There's a shoot-out on a rollercoaster and a climax on a ferry train as it transports passengers in cars through a mountain tunnel. The

Suspicious Death of a Minor is an odd flick in that it is presented as a straight giallo thriller but it's more a *poliziesco*, Euro-crime thriller. The focus is on the detective on the case rather than the killer or a victim who finds himself/herself in a gritty murder plot. In an extended interview with director Martino on the disc's lone extra (besides the theatrical trailer), he says the film was always conceived as a police procedural and he wanted to call it **Violent Milan**, but the distributor changed it and tried to sell it as a giallo. (The following year **Milano Violenta** was released, also starring Cassinelli.) The film is also known as **Too Young To Die**, which is the title IMDb has it listed under. Whatever subgenre you want to put it in, this is a solid, entertaining thriller and Cassinelli is quite good as the wisecracking detective. He takes his job seriously but isn't afraid to perform some of the stray comedy bits. (Running jokes include the detective always breaking his glasses and driving a car that is constantly falling apart.) Cassinelli was a staple of Italian exploitation cinema, working with the likes of Lucio Fulci (**Murder Rock**, **New Gladiators**) and Luigi Cozzi (**Hercules**), among many others. He appeared in several Martino films, including **Screamers**, **The Great Alligator** and **The Scorpion with Two Tails**. Unfortunately, it was on the set of Martino's **Fists of Steel** that Cassinelli perished in a horrible helicopter accident. This is probably my favorite of his films with Martino. Arrow's superb release is ideal for fans of '70s Italian thrillers. ♂



Tim Ferrante's TRAILERS OF TERROR!

GARAGEHOUSE PICTURES

(\$24.99 Blu-ray) 11/17

TRAILER TRAUMA 4: TELEVISION TRAUMA (2017) ♂♂♂♂

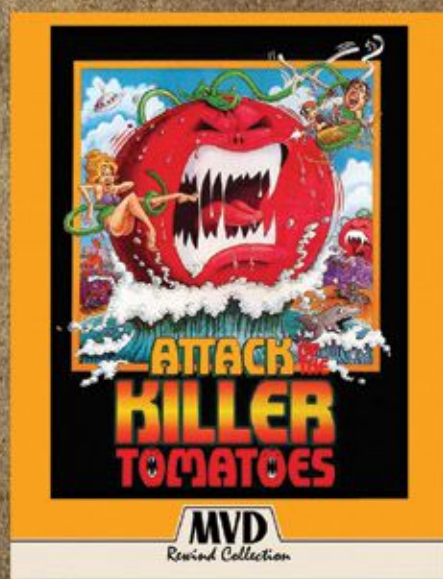
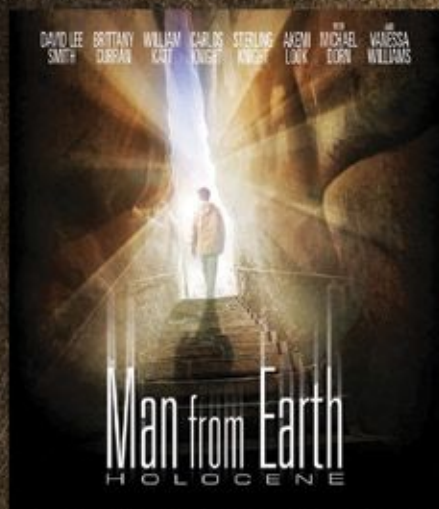
D: Various. 181 mins.



What's a distributor to do? It needs a TV spot, but its product is a lurid, no-budget lemon. The answer? It writes hyperbolic narration, hands it to a voice-over pro like William Conrad or Ernie Anderson, and shows as much action, sex, violence and gore as broadcast standards will allow! Got three hours to kill? **Trailer Trauma Part 4: Television Trauma** delivers this recipe 268 times. That's right, 268 *TV spot commercials* mostly comprised of '70s and '80s horror and exploitation movies. As someone who started collecting 16mm TV spots 45 years ago, I always found it a thrill when I could get my claws on a few choice titles to add to the master collection. Now, with labels like Garagehouse Pictures and its vast film library, we can enjoy these nuggets in 4K color-corrected resolution. The disc tends

to categorize certain genres or themes, if you will. It leads with an emphasis on spots narrated by the unmistakable "Voice of New World Pictures" Ron Gans. One after another in 30- and 60-second spurts with cuts-on-the-action energy, these micros of feature-length films punctuate their visuals with Gans' deep pipes and narration copy that promised much from films that were often thin on delivery. **Twilight People** touts its "herd of howling horrors" and "screaming demons screeching through the skies"...or it could just be Filipino actors in weird makeup. Who cares? I'm gonna go see it anyway! Other groupings include Japanese kaiju (kudos to the creators of the fast-paced **Terror of Godzilla**), chop-socky imports, animal threats (watch for 1970's **Bigfoot**) and sexy and silly romps such as **Incoming Freshmen**, **Super Vixens** and **Massage Parlor Hookers**. Elsewhere, **Blacula** is an all-time fave that features William Marshall's commanding presence, voice and chilling facial expressions. Joseph Brenner and Associates' **Torso** has been a standout for decades thanks to its combination of narration copy that interacts with moving graphics and skilled music editing of Alan Parker's library music composition **Hippy**. Watch for interesting obscurities such as **Alabama's Ghost**, **The Black Six**, **Zaat** and **Big Zapper**. Hear Dick Tufeld narrate **Castle of Blood** and **Hercules in the Haunted World** double feature! Hear Adolph Caesar magnify the virtues of **Doctor Butcher, M.D.** ("I'm determined to have your brain!")! Hear...well, you get the idea. The Blu-ray has been encoded ABC (all regions) available through diabolikdvd.com. ♂

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They Came From The Basement!

By John Seal

VENGEANCE IS MINE (1974) 88

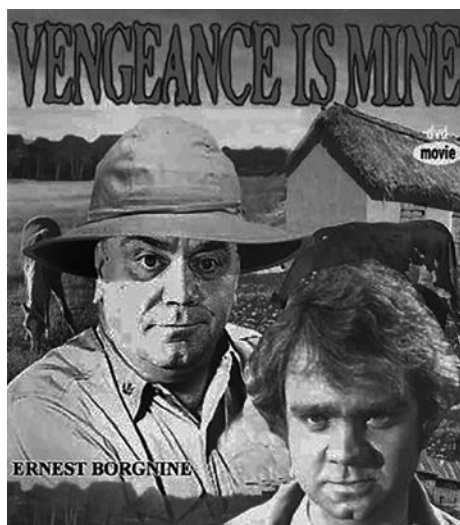
D: John Trent. Ernest Borgnine, Hollis McLaren, Michael J. Pollard, Cec Linder, Louis Zorich. 82 mins. (n.i.d.)

Ernest Borgnine rocketed to fame in 1955 as **Marty**, the sensitive, lovable loser who couldn't find a life partner in Delbert Mann's classic big-screen adaptation of Paddy Chayevsky's famous, eponymously titled television play. The role earned Borgnine his one and only Oscar—he would never again be so much as nominated—and he spent the next half-century typecast as plug-uglies, old grouches, loonies and plain ol' baddies, most of whom were the polar opposite of nice guy Marty.

Vengeance Is Mine (released theatrically as **Sunday in the Country**) features Borgnine at his looniest. He plays Adam Smith, a farmer working his bucolic Middle America smallholding with the assistance of stocky European laborer Luke (Vladimir Valenta) and newly returned from college granddaughter Lucy (Canadian actress McLaren, later seen to great effect in 1977's groundbreaking, gender-bending comedy-drama **Outrageous!**). Adam clearly adores Lucy (who reciprocates his affections) but is old-fashioned enough to expect her to "tend to her cooking" and to accompany him to church in suitable attire whether she likes it or not. He's also the kind of man who, rather than turn to the authorities for assistance in times of trouble, prefers to take matters into his own hands: a man who might occupy a remote bird refuge, for example, or engage in an armed standoff with federal authorities over grazing rights should they push him a wee bit too hard.

So it's not a huge surprise when a trio of big-city bank robbers—boss Dinelli (Zorich), sidekick Ackerman (Felix Leiter himself, Cec Linder), and psychotic loose cannon Leroy (Pollard)—get a less than warm reception when they show up on the doorstep. With word of their murderous and rapacious rampage preceding them on the radio, Adam has had plenty of time to prepare an appropriate greeting for the gang.

It's at this point—where farmer meets felons—that writer-director Trent's screenplay begins to subvert viewer expectations. Most films would take the binary path of good vs. evil, with the baddies immediately seizing control of the situation and bringing unspeakable suffering to the simple country folk, but in **Vengeance Is Mine** it's Adam who seizes



the upper hand—and, except for a few fleeting and suspenseful moments—holds it throughout.

Trent's film is more concerned with tracing the farmer's transition from concerned family man to unhinged angel of death—a change that sits particularly badly with Lucy, who wants to go the police as soon as Gramps has secured the bad guys. Once Adam makes the decision to inflict his own variety of punishment, however, we see what passes as old-fashioned crotchety curdle into evil—a different evil from that represented by the bank robbers, but an evil nonetheless.

As for the gang, we don't get to know them very well, though Pollard is at his gurning best as the loathsome and colorfully y-fronted Leroy, an amoral, smirking monster who'd generate absolutely no sympathy whatsoever in a routine exploitation film. It's a tribute to Trent's screenplay and Borgnine's intense performance that we're able to feel twinges of discomfort as we watch Adam taunt and torture Leroy after chaining him to a wall or suspending him from the ceiling.

Produced in Canada, **Vengeance Is Mine** is definitely *not* a routine exploitationer—in fact, with a little toning down it could have easily been a network Movie of the Week and an Emmy-award winning one at that. Think of it, perhaps, as **Last Little House on the Left of the Prairie**. As for its afterlife on home-video, Atlantic Television's full-frame VHS edition is in decent shape but features badly compressed opening credits. Shot in 2.35:1 Panavision, **Vengeance** deserves a proper restoration in its correct aspect ratio—and if a hard-to-categorize obscurity like **The Legend of Hillbilly John** can be released on a reputable imprint like Kino, why not this one?

Footnote: I have to think a market exists for a compilation of otherwise unreleased country-western songs from 1970s films. **Vengeance Is Mine** features a terrific Paul Hoffert tune entitled "40 Acres of Sorrow" and there are others, including Dorsey Burnette's stunning "Peaceful Verde Valley" from John "Bud" Cardos 1977 epic **Kingdom of the Spiders**. Get busy, bootleggers! 8

Tim Ferrante's SCORING SESSION

'70s Spanish Exploitation!
Goldsmith's **Damnation Alley!**
A Forgotten Score!
A Frightful Box of Vinyl!

We lead with a surprise set of six film scores across three releases from Spain's Quartet Records. The double feature trio are *extremely* limited CD pressings of 300 copies each. Carmelo Bernaola's menacing medieval music for Paul Naschy's **Horror Rises from the Tomb** (1973) is paired with Alfonso Santisteban's **The Killer Is One of Thirteen** (1976), another Naschy starer. Two more Santisteban scores are on one CD featuring the Spanish giallo **Killing of the Dolls** (1975) and **The Butcher of Binbrook** (1971). The third CD features two Fernando Garcia Morcillo scores: **The Witches Mountain** (1975) and **The Night of the Sorcerers** (1974). **Witches** has been on this writer's wish list for decades. All three retail for \$19.95 each. Intrada stunned enthusiasts with a pristine stereo presentation of Jerry Goldsmith's **Damnation Alley** (1977). Once considered a lost gem, the few cues previously released were either damaged or missing electronic tracks. The label uncovered complete multi-channel orchestral session masters and recreated missing elements. A must-have CD priced at \$21.95. The label's **Captains Courageous—The Franz Waxman Collection** (\$39.95) is a four-disc set mastered from ancient studio acetates and tapes. Several Waxman scores are presented, including **Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde** (1941), **Suspicion** (1941) and **The Devil-Doll** (1936). La-La Land Records has rescued David Shire's rejected **Apocalypse Now** (1979) synthesizer score with its world premiere **Apocalypse Now—The Unused Score**, a 20-track CD that's limited to 2000 copies. Priced at \$19.98. Italy's Beat Records provides 13 previously unreleased cues for its CD of Fabio Frizzi's **A Cat in the Brain** (1990) at \$19.95. Death Waltz Recording Co.'s massive eight-LP boxed set entitled **Box of Souls: A Nightmare on Elm Street Collection** contains the original film series' scores from **A Nightmare on Elm Street** (1984) through **Wes Craven's New Nightmare** (1994). Featuring composers such as Charles Bernstein, Christopher Young and Craig Safan, the ambitious release is priced at \$250. Varese Sarabande looked to Stephen King for its thematic boxed set of eight CDs that's limited to 1500 copies. **The Stephen King Collection** is an elaborate celebration of excellent film and TV music comprised of out-of-print, expanded and premiere titles: W. G. Snuffy Walden's **The Stand** (1994), Nicholas Pike's **The Shining** (1997), Tangerine Dream's **Firestarter** (1984) and James Newton Howard's **Dreamcatcher** (2003). Buy direct from the label for best pricing (\$89.98) but you'd better step on it. *Ta-da!* 8

REELING BACK MONDO CLEO

By Nancy Naglin

CLEOPATRA (1963) ⚡⚡⚡⚡

D: Joseph L. Mankiewicz (Rouben Mamoulian and Darryl F. Zanuck uncredited). Elizabeth Taylor, Richard Burton, Rex Harrison, Roddy McDowall, Martin Landau, Hume Cronyn, George Cole, Pamela Brown, Cesare Danova, Kenneth Haigh. 248 mins. (20th Century Fox)

In the early '60s, rummaging about to cash in on the historical epic of antiquity gravy train—the previous decade had seen the success of **Samson and Delilah** (1949), **The Robe** (1953), **The Silver Chalice** (1954), **The Ten Commandments** (1956), and **Ben Hur** (1959)—20th Century Fox decided to reprise Theta Bara's 1917 **Cleopatra** in a modestly priced \$2 million remake to be filmed amidst potted palms plunked down on the cheap in a London studio. Thirty-one million dollars later, **Cleopatra**, then the most expensive film ever made (Taylor commanded a one million dollar salary; she was eventually paid seven because of delays), was plagued by changes in directors and actors, relocation to Rome, necessitating the rebuilding of elaborate sets, illness (Taylor became hospitalized, requiring a tracheotomy [the scar is visible in some scenes]) and, of course, worldwide interest in and moralizing about Taylor and Burton's scandalous, adulterous affair and nearly bankrupted 20th Century Fox.

Because the movie and the affair were chronicled as the same circus, I thought the film was a joke and never bothered to see it. What a mistake! The ceaseless turmoil (there never was a shooting script) resulted in an unwieldy six-hour film. Though Mankiewicz had been fired during the editing process, then rehired because nobody knew as much about it as he did, the studio rejected his pleas to bring the film out as two movies, **Caesar and Cleopatra** and **Antony and Cleopatra**, and instead brutally reduced the film to a 148-minute mishmash. While this 50th anniversary edition, beautifully restored from resurrected elements, does justice to Mankiewicz's edited vision, the search is still on for three-and-a-half-hours of missing footage. Nonetheless, in its reconstituted form, **Cleopatra** is a marvel as spectacle and history and because it is true. It's the Yankees and the Mets, the War of the Roses, Hillary and Trump, winners and losers. The story, based on a book by Carlo Maria Franzero (in turn based on the histories of Plutarch, Suetonius and Appian and with a script doctored by an uncredited Ben Hecht), retells the un-

doing and collapse of the Roman republic when, in 48 B.C., Julius Caesar (Harrison) pursues his recently vanquished enemy Pompey to Egypt. Immediately, the astonishingly eye-catching pomp and imagined verisimilitude which infuse the entire film (untold thousands were spent just creating jewelry) are on full display as Caesar, not terribly pleased, is presented with Pompey's head, a getting-to-know-you gift from ineffectual ruler Ptolemy, Cleopatra's brother. While Ptolemy plots against Caesar, Cleopatra, sensing an opening to depose her brother, arranges a gift of her own and has herself, rolled in a rug, delivered by her faithful, adoring attendant Apollodorus (Danova) to a diffident but soon-to-be seduced Caesar.

Right from the get-go the film alternates between scenes of intense, brutish, magnificently staged conflagrations, skirmishes and, later, naval battles—the crowning apex of pre-CGI enactments that leave you wondering and marveling at the techniques—and Pinteresque dialogue intended to wound, barb and ensnare as Cleopatra, knowing her dynasty is irrevocably entwined with Rome, must mate. Eventually, Caesar is smitten, Cleopatra is Queen of Egypt, their child Caesarion is acknowledged, and Mankiewicz's wished-for **Caesar and Cleopatra** concludes with Cleopatra's triumphant entrance to Rome, one of filmdom's immortal scenes, right up there with David Lean's fabled mirage sequence in **Lawrence of Arabia**. Be prepared to let the size, scale and pageantry take your breath away. Act Two, what Mankiewicz intended as **Antony and Cleopatra**, is at once darker, deeper and surprisingly intimate and personal—after all the decades more like social media—as we see Antony (Burton) and Cleopatra lounge, bathe and bitch. The sexual is the political. Once Caesar had been assassinated in 44 B.C. and Caesarion passed over as heir, the empire had been split among a triumvirate of rivals. Cleopatra must pick a winner and sets her sights on seducing the mercurial, impressionable, all-powerful ruler of the East, Burton's moody, mewling, magnificent Antony. Burton's performance confirms his stature as one of the finest actors ever; Taylor as Cleopatra exceeds her reputation. Their nemesis is Caesar's great-nephew and heir intended, the singularly ruthless and deceitful Octavian (McDowall). Antony whines and prevaricates; Cleopatra soothes and inspires him. If the gender roles were reversed, she would be leading the charge. In art imitating life, Antony, lovable but flawed, is an undependable lush. What a pleasure to feast on the cinematic glories of the prolonged naval battle crowning Octavian as Caesar Augustus and sealing Antony's fate. Mishaps there are aplenty: Cleopatra, assuming Antony was killed, ordered the Egyptian ships to retreat; Antony followed, leaving his armada leaderless. Alone, together, the would-be Caesars live with recrimination, love/hatred, and the bottle. The mood is



reverent, elegiac tragedy distilled to a vapor. Months later, Cleopatra wills Antony to retake control of his troops to fight Augustus's advancing army.

This film is unbelievably rich in detail, dialogue, motive and psychology. Just when you think it can't deliver anything more, history provides a wrenching finale which Mankiewicz brings to life. In the night, Antony's troops had deserted. Rufius (Landau), Antony's lone loyal officer, kills himself, Apollodorus gets his revenge on a dying Antony, and we follow the heart-sick Antony into Cleopatra's tomb where the Queen is preparing to embrace the asp. (Augustus, of course, who had promised Cleopatra her son was well, had had him killed.) **Cleopatra**, the highest-grossing film of '63, earning \$57.7 million in the U.S. and with marketing and production costs of \$44 million, registered a loss, but in our age of attack politics is timelier than ever. This edition is bursting with extras, notably the incomparable **Cleopatra: The Film That Changed Hollywood**. Other extras include commentary with Chris Mankiewicz, Tom Mankiewicz, Martin Landau and Jack Brodsky; **Cleopatra Through the Ages: A Cultural History**; **Cleopatra's Missing Footage**; **The Cleopatra Papers: A Private Correspondence**; **The Fourth Star of Cleopatra**; Fox Movietone News: Archival Footage of the New York Premiere and Hollywood Premieres. The pre-CGI antiquity genre expired because of spiraling costs and changing tastes: the last, **The Greatest Story Ever Told**, appeared two years later. ⚡

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LAUREN ASHLEY CARTER: WOMAN WITH A PLAN

As Told To Chris Hallock

Acclaimed actor Lauren Ashley Carter is hailed as an up-and-comer, but those who've followed her career recognize an already prolific talent who's barely grazed the surface of her potential. She's accumulated a staggering body of work consisting of multi-dimensional characters like distraught Peggy Cleek in Lucky McKee's vicious satire **The Woman** (2011); pregnant teen Ada in Chad Crawford Kinkle's eerie cult film **Jug Face** (2013); psychokinetic Rachel Meadows in Joe Begos' tongue-in-cheek telekinetic terror **The Mind's Eye** (2015); the haunted namesake of Mickey Keating's stark **Darling** (2016); and a dual role in Natasha Kermani's existential sci-fi **Imitation Girl** (2017). Carter has also stepped behind the camera as a producer and directed the short film **Introducing Parker Dowd** (2015), a comedic work inspired by New York City's competitive performance world. Carter has proven she's a creative force of nature through her onscreen work and, as an advocate for artists off-screen, has secured a place as one of the most important voices in independent cinema today.—CH

CHRIS HALLOCK What was your creative life like growing up—did you know from an early age that you wanted to pursue acting?

LAUREN ASHLEY CARTER As soon as I found out it was a thing you could do as a profession, I wanted to do it. It was funny, that moment you realize the people you're watching in these movies, you find out it's a job with scripts and all that. From a very young age I thought, "Wow, how cool is that." As far as acting goes, that didn't really take off right away. I started writing scripts. I really got interested in plays and I started reading a ton of plays. I started with Shakespeare at way too young of an age—I would read it and thought that I was really cool, but I don't think I understood anything I was reading. I started writing plays for my classmates in second grade; I would run them down at recess and make them do my scripts! Anytime we had free time in class I would force the entire class to do my plays. I remember being very frustrated with the actors, with my friends who I didn't think were giving my work the respect it deserved. I decided from then I would act in my own plays, so I started acting in my own things I was writing.

CH It's troubling that in our political climate there are threats to the National Endowment for the Arts and other programs because art is not seen as having value in our society. Where do you think you'd be now if you didn't have art growing up?

LAC It's really challenging. For me, I was going to find it no matter what. I was going to try to educate myself and be there because I come from a family that loves art. They're not artists by any means—they're computer programmers and engineers—but they love it so much and I had that support from them. So many people don't have that at home, they don't prioritize it, but I think it absolutely saves lives in many ways. For me, I can't do anything else; it is my life. I can't imagine a life without it and I'll try every way to fight for it as much as I can.

CH How does being behind the camera inform what you do in front of it? Has it changed your approach as an actor knowing what the director or producer is going through?

LAC There are times as an actor that you need some help or you want to talk to the director but you see them being very busy. You think, "Oh well, I don't want to bother them." Especially as a woman, I find myself very silenced by my own notions and my own fears of being called a "diva" or being needy. It can be very lonely on the other side: you've got cameras in your face, people who just want to get the shot, then they move on. It's important to validate them and to also make sure that they know they're doing good work.

CH You've portrayed characters with great depth, which is a challenge within genre film that's all too often generic. Is it luck or do you have any leverage at this point in picking and choosing the roles being offered?

LAC I think it's a combination. I definitely have had scripts sent to me that are too close to something I've done and lacking the depth. I did this movie called **Rising Stars**, which is like a family movie with producer Andrew van den Houten, and he's the one who introduced me to Lucky McKee. I was a huge Lucky McKee fan because **May** is one of my favorite movies. I knew they were working on another movie together, so he introduced me to Lucky. I was very fortunate Lucky trusted me even though he didn't know me. We had conversations about film and the script and he gave me a chance. After **The Woman** was such a success in the indie world, it opened up some doors for me. People started asking, "Who is she, what is she doing?" It was a smaller role but there was some interest. Then Chad [Crawford Kinkle] wanted me for **Jug Face**. I read that script and really, really loved it. I sat at the table and went through it and I could relate to it in many ways because of where I'm from—the desperation and lack of education. It



was something I really wanted to do, especially when I found out Sean Bridgers was in it, who is one of my favorite actors. I didn't really get a chance to work with him on **The Woman** that often, so I was ecstatic to get to work with him on a much more frequent basis and closer context. After that, Mickey Keating was interning with Larry Fessenden and found this production company Illium Pictures that I work through. He wanted to find an actress out of New York and he had seen my work in **Jug Face**. He trusted me and hired me for that.

CH You've done a little comedy and have gone outside of horror, but are you drawn to darker material in general? Is that where you prefer to work?

LAC I don't ever want to repeat something, which when you stay in one genre too long, it can happen. I love comedy, and when I do theater, I only do comedy for the most part. I don't think I've been cast in a drama for a very long time in theater. I would love to do more comedy on film. I've never done it and I don't know how exhausting that would be, to try that take after take. I'd love the challenge of it. I had a good time doing **The Mind's Eye** with Joe Begos because there's a little bit of action in it, a little more than I've ever had before. That would be something I'd love to do as well. I don't get exhausted with it; I just don't want to be repetitive within myself more than anything.

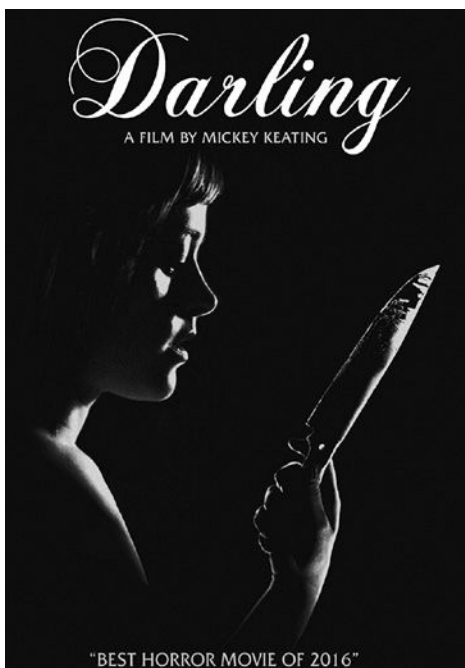
CH There's an evolution of your characters from **The Woman** to **Jug Face** to **Pod**—these are progressively empowered women. Is that something you shape as you're creating the characters or are screenwriters crafting these roles?

“People were getting bitten all day long. I put so much DEET on that my hair started falling out!”
Lauren Ashley Carter
on *Jug Face*

LAC It’s definitely been in the scripts and that is what I’m gravitating towards, for sure. I think as I’m getting older, I’m feeling more confident, but that also stems from having zero confidence whatsoever. It just happens to be that way, I think. There’s also times where I see something that makes my eye twitch a little bit that isn’t so accurate—we can have discussions about them. Luckily, every director I’ve worked with has been open to those discussions and very happy to facilitate them and to make these women as three-dimensional as possible.

CH You work a lot with Mickey Keating, who appears to be a very precise and exacting director. Did you ever have any friction in creating a character, or does he give you quite a bit of leeway?

LAC As far as character goes, there’s a ton of leeway. He’s very exact and precise in the shots and setups and composition, for sure—there’s no discussion that that’s how those are going to happen. Within the scenes, like when we did *Pod*, there’s a really long kitchen scene between the three siblings, and that was really free—he wanted it to play out like a stage play, however we wanted to do it. Of course, it was very difficult to do that in the end because the lighting was so dim in that room, so you have to figure out where you’re going to stand. He’s very free about the character. We developed *Darling* to-



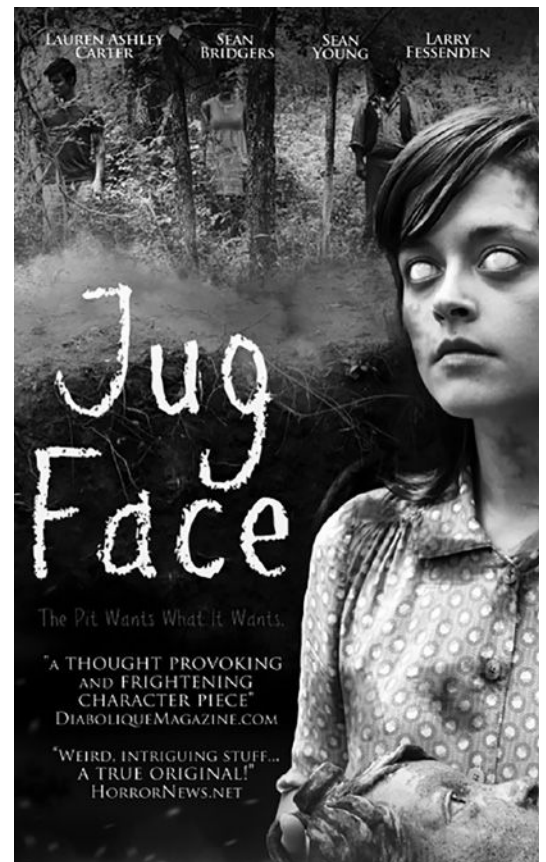
gether over the phone while he was in New York and I was in L.A. Once I got there, he really let me run loose.

CH Has the landscape changed at all for women creators since you first began vs. where you are now? Have you noticed any significant changes?

LAC The biggest change I’m seeing is people talking about it and people being upset about it, which is always where it starts. These conversations haven’t stopped, they have been continuing amongst women and the men that care. I think also that a lot of women when I started were production assistants or script supervisors are now in positions of power and they worked very hard to get there. These are younger women in their early to late twenties and I think this has been happening at many levels in many places. I see it as seeds, these wonderful women are seeds that have been planted, and in time, they’re going to have more power. Hopefully, they all remember why they started this and what they want to do with that power.

CH What was your most intense experience on set?

LAC Making indie films, there’s always a gem from every single one. Like I said, the conditions are never good. *The Woman* was probably the most pleasant for me because I was mostly inside. With *Jug Face*, we had ticks—the worst year for ticks Tennessee had ever seen. People were getting bitten all day long. I put so much DEET on that my hair started falling out! My costumes were just being eaten by the DEET! All of the scenes in *Jug Face* were really difficult, and Chad, the director, had tried to mix up the script, so every day we were shooting all over the script. It was difficult for me to get in the right headspace with everything because we were shooting so out of order. Sometimes I’d be shooting a scene after something intense that we hadn’t shot yet, so in my mind I had to imagine what I’m going to be like after that scene to inform this moment here. Sean Bridgers was so helpful; he’d go over the script with me every day. He’s like my glorified acting coach and I don’t think I’d have been able to do it without him. You’re doing these scenes, and Larry Fessenden is just the funniest guy, he’s such a sweetheart—he’s having to whip my back, and right before we’re joking, laughing, talking about lunch. Then they’re stringing me up to these hooks! In that context, if you don’t have your privacy on indie films, you don’t have space, you don’t have time. That was probably my most challenging, and it definitely helped me and made me a better performer. After that I knew what I needed to be and what I needed around me—it informed a lot for me.



CH Have you been transformed by your own characters, or did they already exist within you?

LAC I think that there are pieces that are definitely there. It’s funny, it can be cathartic in a way, especially for Peggy in *The Woman*—I don’t think that I’ll ever go back there again. I don’t think that I’ll need to—the vulnerability and the abuse. I think the other characters you’re working with are so helpful; these ensemble pieces feel so easy because you have a whole family to rely on and you build your own stories. It’s very easy to become someone else because you’re curious about who they are in your relationship with them. With something like *Darling* where it’s just me, that’s a little more difficult because you don’t really have anyone to anchor yourself. Luckily, she didn’t need to be anchored, so that was helpful. It can be very lonely without any other acting partners.

CH What do you have coming up?

LAC *Imitation Girl*, directed by Natasha Karamani, is coming up. It’s going to be at CineQuest Festival. It’s a sci-fi drama and I play two characters in that, Juliana, a struggling performer in New York City, and her imitation which is an alien lady. I’m raising money right now for *Love Shy*, which is a drama my friends wrote out in L.A., and we’ll be shooting in our home town in Ohio. I’m writing my horror novel, and we have another script in the works which is a medieval demon film. These are coming up around the corner. ☿

The Phantom's NOIR GANG

KINO LORBER FILMS

(\$29.95 Blu-ray) 10/17

THE MAN WHO DIED TWICE (1958)
B&W 888

D: Joe Kane. Rod Cameron, Vera Ralston, Mike Mazurki, Gerald Milton, Richard Karlan, Don Megowan. 70 mins.

Rugged Rod plays Bill Brennon, an undercover cop out to solve his club owner/suspected criminal brother's mysterious demise and the subsequent murder of a pair of investigating narcs. To that end, Bill attempts to get next to widow Lynn (Ralston), who continues her gig as a popular chanteuse at her allegedly late hubby's club, where she endures the unwanted protective attention of tough but soft-hearted bartender Rak (a hulking Mazurki in fine knuckle-dragging form). Seems that Bill's errant bro' vanished while owing a sizable smack stash to the mob, explaining the presence of a brace of torpedoes, Santoni (Karlan) and Hart (Milton), determined to recover the dope and eliminate any potential witnesses. Veteran Republic Pictures helmer Kane (see John Stanley's posthumous profile/interview in VS #94), with more than a little help from cinematographer Jack A. (Duel) Marta and future **Vanishing Point** scripter Richard Sarafian, elevates this potentially routine programmer, one of the second-tier studio's final films before folding the following year, to solid B-noir status. While Rod's his usual stolid self and Republic honcho Herbert Yates' longtime East Euro squeeze Ralston lacks a bit of thespic sparkle, some surprisingly brutal tableaux, most notably the agents' violent killings, and character grace notes add considerable flavor, with Milton's dyspeptic, cat-hating thug Hart and Jesslyn Fax's Sally, a snoopy old lady who harbors a secret of her own, emerging as particular standouts. Kino's sharp 4K restoration brings the black-and-white widescreen film to further vibrant life. Look for Cameron clone Megowan, still years from his immortal turn as Craigus in **The Creation of the Humanoids**, in a last-reel cameo. For some reason, in a pic packed with credited character actors, reliable thesp Rayford (**The Wild Bunch**) Barnes appears uncredited as a stakeout detective. **The Man Who Died Twice** reps a fun return to the second features of yore, complemented by film historian Toby Roan's optional audio commentary, along with a Kino trailer gallery. Would love to see more elusive '50s Republic B movies, like **Juvenile Jungle** and **The Notorious Mr. Monks**, join the Blu-ray ranks.

WARNER ARCHIVE
NOIR DOUBLE FEATURES

(\$17.99 each) 10/17

DECOY (1946)B&W 8881/2

D: Jack Bernhard. Jean Gillie, Edward Norris, Robert Armstrong, Herbert Rudley, Sheldon Leonard, Marjorie Woodworth. 76 mins.

Like fellow Britisher Peggy Cummins in Joseph H. Lewis's later classic **Gun Crazy**, toxic blonde Gillie torches the screen and the film's hapless male characters with equal ease in an ace noir that ranks right up there with Edgar G. Ulmer's better-known **Detour** (VS #49). Gillie plays femme fatale Margot, whose chances of laying her greedy mitts on \$400,000 in stolen loot rests with heist co-conspirator Frank (Armstrong, of **King Kong** immortality). Trouble is, Frank's on death row and won't divulge the info to Margot and slimy partner Jim (Norris). In a sci-fi move reminiscent of Boris Karloff's late-'30s mad scientist chillers (e.g., **The Man They Could Not Hang**), Margot dupes doctor Craig (Rudley) into reviving Frank's gassed corpse with a handy substance dubbed Methylene Blue. The plot thickens from there as, per the pic's precocious proto-feminist tag line, our antiheroine "Treats Men the Way They've Been Treating Women for Years!" Despite its swift pace and slender running time, **Decoy** overflows with inspired creative touches, from a supremely spooky opening sequence to ironic dialogue (e.g., "Don't let that face go to your head!"), bizarre comic details (two morgue attendants pass their downtime expanding their vocabularies with the help of a dog-eared dictionary) and a healthy contempt for human nature that's evident throughout. (And dig Frank's priceless reaction when he realizes he's returned to life.) While **Decoy** lacks some of the dark visual pizzazz that Ulmer lent **Detour**, the script (by scenarist/actor Ned Young, later of **Terror in a Texas Town** fame, from a story by Stanley Rubin) and performances are top-drawer. Remarkably, in 2006, writer Rubin was still around to share a commentary with film historian Glenn Erickson; not so, alas, Ms. Gillie, who tragically succumbed to pneumonia in 1949 at age 33.

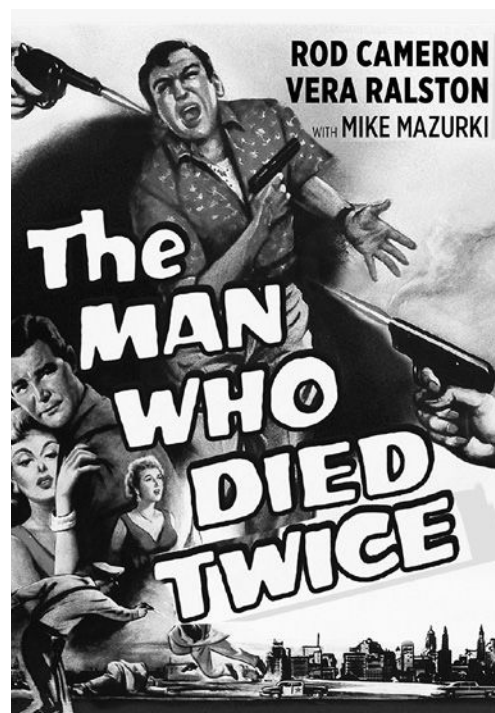
Decoy shares a top Warner Archive disc with Andre de Toth's sizzling 1952 caper **Crime Wave** (888), with dancer Gene Nelson cast as a well-meaning ex-con squeezed by former criminal cronies (including a young Charles Bronson, then thesping under his birth handle Buchinsky, as a brutally tough mug) and lawmen led by a bitter and hard-bitten Sterling Hayden.

WHERE DANGER LIVES (1950)B&W 8881/2

D: John Farrow. Robert Mitchum, Faith Domergue, Claude Rains, Maureen O'Sullivan, Charles Kemper. 82 mins.

TENSION (1949)B&W 8881/2

D: John Berry. Richard Basehart, Audrey Totter, Barry Sullivan, Cyd Charisse, Tom D'Andrea, William Conrad. 95 mins.



Normally breeze-cool Bob largely abandons his usual low-key machismo, undergoing much ethical anguish, physical pain and serious pride reduction as Jeff Cameron, a dedicated young doc who makes the major mistake of tumbling for wildly nutzoid Margo (erstwhile Howard Hughes paramour Domergue in an intense perf that belies her rep as a mediocre thesp). When Margo shows up on Jeff's watch as a failed suicide victim, the latter helps save her life, which she promptly walks out on. But does Jeff let well enough alone? 'Course not! He actively volunteers for a prime spot in Margo's wicked web, in short order ditching his medical gig and nurse squeeze Julie (O'Sullivan), seemingly slaying Margo's smug sugar daddy spouse Frederick (a brilliant Rains), and setting off with his insane inamorata on the highway to Hell (or at least Nogales, N.M.). Snappily scripted by future **Curse of the Demon** scenarist Charles Bennett from a story by Leo Rosten, tensely directed (with many effective stationary camera shots) by Farrow (father of Mia, whose mom is cast as Nurse Julie), and atmospherically lensed by Nicholas (Bedlam) Musuraca, **Where Danger Lives** packs a lot of offbeat incident and memorable secondary characters into its trim runtime. Standouts include Philip Van Zandt as sleazy border-town fence and "showman" Milo DeLong, and Tol Avery as shady blowhard used-car salesman Honest Hal. Scenes set during an inebriated Wild West celebration and in a two-bit burlesque house lend further color to the noir palette. While not as well-known as such heralded Mitch noirs as **Crossfire** and **Out of the Past** (VS #93), **Where Danger Lives** rates as one of his best. Extras include a brief but interesting analysis, **Where Danger Lives: A White Rose for Julie**, by cinema scholars and fans (Dick Cavett among them), audio commentary by film historians Alain Silver and James Ursini, and the original theatrical trailer.

Film noir femmes fatale tended to come in two broad categories: the loony and the floozy. If **Where Danger Lives'** Faith Domergue clearly conforms to the first designation, **Tension's** Audrey Totter fits firmly in the second. Totter's cast as Claire, cynical, two-timing, gold-digging wife of milquetoast night-shift pharmacist Warren Quimby (Basehart). Claire's so unconcerned with Warren's feelings that she flirts openly from a stool at the drugstore lunch counter, much to the consternation of Warren's loyal soda-jerk best bud Freddie (D'Andrea). When Warren unwisely confronts Claire's latest paramour, husky, well-heeled slob Barney Deager (Gough) at the latter's Malibu beach house, he winds up playing 98-pound weakling, literally landing glasses-first in the sand. Adopting newfangled contact lenses and vowing vengeance, Warren sets about establishing a fresh identity as cosmetics salesman Paul, leading a double life while he works out his lethal plan. Soon-to-be-blacklisted director Berry's ingeniously constructed noir, scripted by Allen Rivkin, unfolds with suspense to spare. Its narrator—smug, fancifully monikered police lieutenant Collier Bonnabel (Sullivan)—eventually appears onscreen determined to crack the case with a little help from rotund sidekick Sgt. Blackie Gonsales (future **Cannon** star Conrad) and much assistance from Claire herself, with whom he proceeds to hook up to further muddy the moral waters. Basehart, who'd impressed as an elusive psycho killer in the previous year's **He Walked by Night** (VS #21), turns in standout work as both the meek Warren and his more confident invented self Paul. Wherever there's a femme fatale, there's bound to be a good girl for balance, and dancer Charisse ably fills those shoes as Paul's bright, zesty neighbor Mary Chanler, offering a bit more pizzazz than Margaret O'Sullivan's nice but bland nurse in **Where Danger Lives**. Totter, meanwhile, is terrific as Claire and, at age 90, was able to join film scholars Alain Silver and Elizabeth Ward for an audio commentary originally recorded in 2007; she likewise appears in the featurette **Tension: Who's Guilty Now?** Withal, a top-notch noir double bill.

ILLEGAL (1955)B&W8881/2

D: Lewis Allen. Edward G. Robinson, Nina Foch, Hugh Marlowe, Albert Dekker, Jayne Mansfield, Ellen Corby. 88 mins.

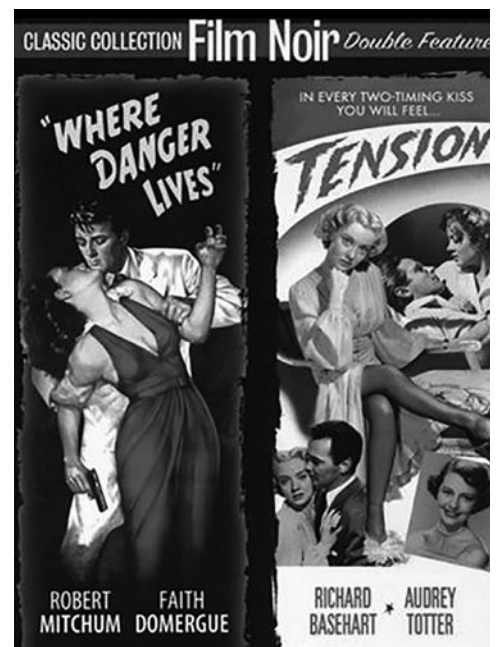
According to late film critic Richard Schickel in the featurette **Illegal: Marked for Life**, Robinson, having been "graylisted" (i.e., kept out of contention for top "A" movie roles) by HUAC and undergoing a wrenching divorce, was in a down period when he starred in A-/B+ crime films like **Vice Squad** (1953), **Black Tuesday** (1954), **A Bullet for Joey**, **Hell on Frisco Bay** and **Illegal** (all 1955), but most of those films and his authoritative thesping hold up extremely well today. **Ille-**

gal may be the best of the bunch. In a plot reminiscent of an updated 1930s Warner Bros. crime saga, Robinson shines as brilliant, pugnacious, at times underhanded prosecutor Victor Scott, whose talents inadvertently condemn an innocent man (DeForest Kelley) to death. After hitting the alky skids, Victor reemerges as a shady defense attorney who's ultimately embroiled with gangster kingpin Frank Garland (Dekker). Another central dramatic thread deals with Victor's relationship with young lawyer cohort Ellen Miles (Foch), whom he virtually reared, schooled and later employed (according to actress Foch, she was originally intended as his love interest but their obvious age difference prompted producers to nix that notion), now married to legal colleague Ray Borden (Marlowe). Briskly paced without feeling rushed, **Illegal** works in a plethora of neat plot twists and intrigues that Edward G. and cast sell with ease, no matter how credulity-stretching. The film also provides a field day for solid character actors, from Jan Merlin (sort of a poor fan's Richard Widmark) in a typically nasty turn as Frank's personal hitman to Corby as Victor's loyal if acerbic secretary, Jay Adler as a down-and-out defendant, and Mansfield as Frank's voluptuous and not-so-dumb blonde squeeze Angel O'Hara. In addition to the featurette, Warner Archive's DVD includes an audio commentary by Foch and film historian Patricia King Hanson, an Edward G. Robinson **Behind the Camera** segment from the vintage TV series **Warner Bros. Presents**, and the original trailer.

Sharing a twin bill with **Illegal** is Don Siegel's chase film **The Big Steal** (1949), sort of a Noir Lite reuniting **Out of the Past** (VS #93) costars Robert Mitchum and Jane Greer as mismatched partners in hot pursuit of a crooked Patric Knowles, complemented by film historian Richard B. Jewell's audio commentary.

ACT OF VIOLENCE (1949)B&W8881/2
D: Fred Zinneman. Van Heflin, Robert Ryan, Janet Leigh, Mary Astor, Phyllis Thaxter, Berry Kroeger. 83 mins.

One of the harshest, starkest noirs to surface during America's immediate postwar period, **Act of Violence** is a festering wound of a film, as well as a brilliant study in literal and figurative light and dark. From the first scenes, Euro emigre auteur Zinneman sets up his two mortal antagonists, limp-slowed WWII survivor Joe Parkson (Ryan), glimpsed in a low-lit NYC apartment loading his service .45, then heading into a deserted nocturnal street on the first crippled leg of his journey. Next we view his intended mark, Frank Enley (Heflin), a successful builder and family man, seen basking in both the sunshine of idyllic small-town Santa Lisa, CA, and the admiration of a grateful local citizenry gathered to honor his latest project. Before the twain collide, Frank confesses his shameful backstory to wife Edith (an almost unrecognizably young Leigh): while interned in a Nazi POW camp, he ratted out fellow inmates, Joe among them, planning a seemingly suicidal tunnel break, ostensibly to



lighten the men's certain punishment but possibly to save his own skin, probably both. While Joe relentlessly stalks his prey in the present, ignoring his own girlfriend Ann's (Thaxter) emotional efforts to dissuade him from his destructive mission, Frank grows increasingly desperate, undergoing a powerfully visualized moral descent, courtesy of ace cinematographer Robert Surtees, as his guilt-torched conscience drives him, in rapid succession, to a stygian Angel's Flight skid row bar, a dessicated prostitute (Astor), a backroom "lawyer" (Taylor Holmes), a scurvy hitman (Kroeger), and finally down a literal tunnel whose light will be denied him and which, like Joe's in the German prison camp, will offer no escape. No one played soul-sick better than Ryan—see **Crossfire**, **On Dangerous Ground**, **Clash by Night**, **Odds Against Tomorrow**, et al—and **Act of Violence** proves no exception. Heflin holds up admirably in the unenviable role of the nice guy with a cowardly core, doomed to repeat a grotesque parody of his misfired wartime behavior in the demimonde of civilian life. Former screen sex symbol Astor, best remembered as Bogie's worldly femme fatale foil in **The Maltese Falcon**, shines in a decidedly low-glam cameo as a fading, fortysomething hooker with a heart of, if not gold, then at least some semblance of humanity. Frequent villain Kroeger (himself often cast as Germans) easily sells the sociopathic hood who becomes a key cog in the movie's fatalistic machinations. Extras include a commentary by noir historian Dr. Drew Casper and the featurette **Act of Violence: Dealing with the Dead**.

Completing the noir double bill is John Sturges' **Mystery Street** (1950), an excellent early foray into forensic crime-solving starring Ricardo Montalban (pre-**Fantasy Island** and sans a shred of rich Corinthian leather) as a dogged Portuguese-American Boston cop out to solve a murder case, with a memorable supporting turn by Elsa Lanchester. ♂

TELE-VIDEO WHO GOES THERE

By Dan Cziraky

BBC VIDEO

(\$14.98 DVD) 1/17

DOCTOR WHO: THE POWER OF THE DALEKS (1966) 88 1/2

D: Christopher Barry. Patrick Troughton, Anneke Wills, Michael Craze, Bernard Archard, Peter Bathurst, Robert James, Nicholas Hawtrey, Pamela Ann Davy, Martin King. 150 mins. 11/16

While the concept of the lead actor in **Doctor Who** being replaced by a different actor through the process of "regeneration" is quite commonplace today (it has happened three times since the series was revived in 2005), in 1966 it was literally unheard of. But, as series star William Hartnell's health was deteriorating, the need to replace him became evident. And so at the end of the fourth season story **The Tenth Planet**, which introduced the popular villain species the Cybermen, Hartnell's Doctor collapses to the floor of the TARDIS and undergoes a startling metamorphosis—into younger actor Patrick Troughton (**Jason and the Argonauts**, **The Omen**). Sadly, all tapes of his first full story, **The Power of the Daleks**, were destroyed during a BBC "housekeeping" purge in the early 1970s. (Unlike American television series, many British shows of the time were never rebroadcast or syndicated.) In the days before VCRs, fans used to record the audio portion of TV shows on cassette tapes, so the audio for **Power** has survived. In 2016, the BBC produced an animated reconstruction of **Power** to be released via the BBC Store exactly 50 years after its original broadcast, prior to the DVD release.

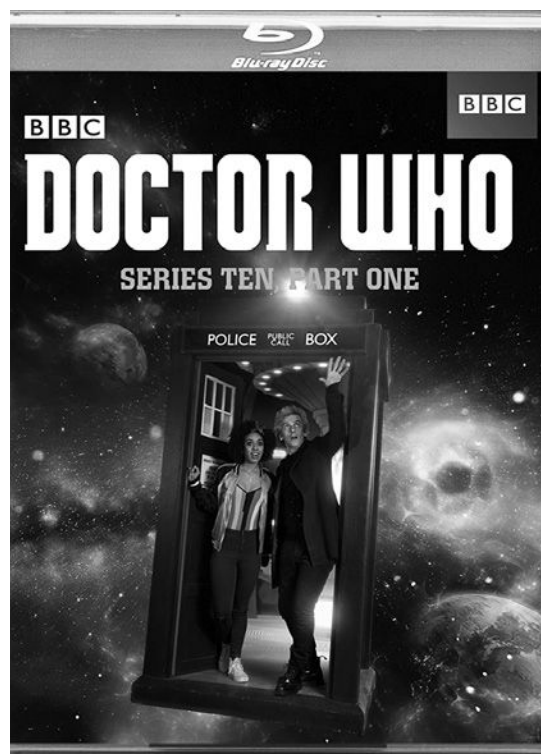
Following the Doctor's regeneration into a younger body (Troughton), the TARDIS lands at an Earth colony on the planet Vulcan in the far future. Mistaken for an official Earth Examiner, with Ben (Craze) and Polly (Wills) his assistants, the Doctor discovers that top scientist Lesterson (James) is attempting to enter a crashed space capsule pulled from the planet's mercury swamps. Inside, three inanimate Daleks are discovered. The colonists, on the verge of a civil uprising, ignore the Doctor's warnings that the Daleks are evil and dangerous. Once reactivated, the Daleks trick Lesterson and the other scientists into believing they are benign "servants," while secretly reproducing themselves to seize control of the planet and begin galactic conquest. The Doctor's erratic new personality eventually sorts itself out, and the adventures of the Second Doctor lead the series into a new era of popularity.

While the story itself is considered one of the best Dalek adventures, the animation is very lackluster. It resembles something fans might have thrown together over the course of a few free weekends rather than a professional effort. Troughton's Doctor is given a rough, almost villainous character design instead of the whimsical Cosmic Hobo he came to portray. Reaction shots from secondary characters all seem to feature the exact same "mild surprise" expression. While it's nice to finally have *something* to represent this important bit of Whovian history that was so thoughtlessly tossed aside, a better effort could have been made to capture the characters. The re-creation is presented in both color and B&W, with audio options for 5.1 stereo or the original mono tracks. Extras include: cast and crew audio commentary, animation & photo gallery, behind-the-scenes featurette and more.

DOCTOR WHO: SERIES 10, PART 1 (2017) 88 1/2

D: Various. Peter Capaldi, Pearl Mackie, Matt Lucas, Michelle Gomez. 275 mins. (\$24.98) 6/17

After a year-long hiatus that only saw the release of a Christmas Special in 2016 (**The Return of Doctor Mysterio**, VS #104), the adventures of the time-traveling Time Lord the Doctor (Capaldi) resumed in April 2017. This two-disc set collects episodes 1-6. Disc 1 contains the first four episodes. In **The Pilot**, the Doctor and Nardole (Lucas) are laying low at a London university, where the Doctor is an eccentric lecturer. Bill Potts (Mackie) works in the cafeteria but has secretly been sitting in on the Doctor's lectures. Bill becomes infatuated with another student, Heather, who has a pigment defect in her eye in the shape of a star. This defect attracts the attention of a strange puddle of water at a construction site that never seems to evaporate. The Doctor listens to Bill's story about Heather and investigates the puddle—yup, it's alien and seems to have taken over Heather! **Smile** sees the Doctor take Bill on a proper adventure to a human colony on a distant planet in the future, one currently inhabited only by smallish robots who communicate via emojis; the robots have evolved into new life forms incapable of interpreting certain human emotions. The Doctor and Bill must sort out the situation before the cryogenically frozen colonists can be revived. **Thin Ice** has the Doctor and Bill detouring to the last great London Ice Festival of 1811. Trying to blend in, the time-travelers are startled to see several people taken into the ice and consumed by some creature. As they investigate, Bill is witness to the classicism, racism and sexism of the 19th century. In **Knock Knock**, Bill and several other students decide to rent a very old mansion. Helping Bill move in, the Doctor (presented to Bill's housemates as her grandfather) is soon drawn to



the mysterious landlord (David Suchet) and several peculiarities of the house. Soon, the story turns into an almost classic haunted house mystery. Disc 2 contains the fifth and sixth episodes. In **Oxygen**, Bill, Nardole and the Doctor arrive on a mining platform in response to a distress beacon. In the future, oxygen is a priceless commodity in space, and the spacesuits worn by the miners are its only source. As the self-aware suits continue to kill their occupants, Bill is put at risk for oxygen deprivation. In order to save her life, the Doctor exposes himself to the vacuum of space—with severe consequences. In **Extremis**, the Doctor accepts a strange request from the Vatican: read a book called *Veritas*, which has caused every previous reader to commit suicide. Also on this disc are **Doctor Who: Inside Look** featurettes for all six episodes. **Doctor Who: Series 10, Part 2** (containing episodes 7-12) was released 9/17, with **Doctor Who: The Complete Series 10** following in November. The 2017 Christmas Special, **Twice Upon a Time**, starring Capaldi, Mackie, Mark Gatiss, and David Bradley (**An Adventure in Space & Time**) as the First Doctor, aired Christmas Day. The Special also introduced the Thirteenth Doctor, Jodie Whittaker. 8

Stay tuned for more **Doctor Who** next issue.

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See page 54 for details.

Nancy Naglin's ART-HOUSE VIDEO

BRIT HISTORY HITS

THE CHARGE OF THE LIGHT BRIGADE (1936)B&W

D: Michael Curtiz. Errol Flynn, Olivia de Havilland, Patric Knowles, Henry Stephenson, Nigel Bruce, C. Henry Gordon, David Niven. 115 mins. (Warner Archive) 9/17

In 1854, in the Battle of Balaclava during the Crimean War, the doomed Light Brigade—"light" because the troops, mounted on exceptionally fast horses, unencumbered by armor, relying on lances and swords, were trained to skirmish and pick off enemies in retreat—conducted a seemingly mad, suicidal assault on a ridge of Russian artillery. Lord Alfred Tennyson in his famous poem tried to put the best spin on the carnage, memorializing valor, but speculation continues to this day as to the cause. The commanders of the British cavalry and the Light Brigade were brothers-in-law who detested each other. Also true is the fact that a captain, charged with relaying orders he had received verbally and possibly believing the Light Brigade hadn't seen sufficient action, waved the troops on in the wrong direction and was mowed down before he could correct his error. From this tragic sequence of events, Curtiz's *Charge* weaves a complete fabrication—loaded with action, internecine tensions and smoldering resentments, and topped with Flynn's signature swashbuckling charisma—that is absolutely compelling. First to the resentment. The British-backed ally, the charming Surat Khan (Gordon), learns the Brits are cutting off his funding and secretly switches his support to the Russians—but not before Maj. Geoffrey Vickers (Flynn) shows up to capably chit-chat and saves the Khan from being killed by a leopard. Fresh from this success, Vickers waltzes into the drawing room aspect of British war games to surprise his brother Capt. Perry Vickers (Knowles), who is betrothed to Elsa Campbell (de Havilland, Flynn's *Captain Blood* costar); Vickers is smitten. The trio maneuvers to advance, squelch and conceal competing love interests until it is clear Campbell must spurn one brother for another. Max Steiner supplies a top-notch score as the Khan pulls a surprise raid/massacre, humiliating the Light Brigade. Now to revenge. Contradicting history, Vickers forges orders sending the Light Brigade to battle. Perhaps the movie major was ignorant of the Russian artillery; it doesn't matter. The nine-minute charge is the reason to see this film and stands as one of the best battle scenes ever. Extras include a vintage newsreel, the shorts *Give Me Liberty* and *Talk with Bob Hope*, classic cartoon and trailers.

THE MADNESS OF KING GEORGE III

(1994)

D: Nicholas Hytner. Nigel Hawthorne, Helen Mirren, Rupert Everett, Ian Holm, Rupert Graves, Amanda Donohoe, John Wood, Julian Wadham, Jim Carter. 104 mins. (Olive) 10/17

Of enduring interest is what happens when the head of state may be mental. In Alan Bennett's biting, satirical play and script, King George III (Hawthorne), never reconciled to having lost the American colonies, is irritatingly eccentric and mercurial, but when does his behavior cross the line and does he need to be removed from office? Interestingly, Bennett, who is both dispassionate yet empathetic sketching the king's descent, laying bare all the indignities together with a host of idiotic doctors and barbaric treatments, has also written about the mental illness plaguing his mother and other family members. While the king's unraveling is dramatic (he is believed to have suffered from intermittent porphyria, a blood disorder causing tell-tale blue urine [!]; new research says he might have just been nuts), Bennett, best known with Dudley Moore, Jonathan Miller and Peter Cook for the 1960 satirical revue *Beyond the Fringe*, aims his darts at what matters when the emperor literally has no clothes: power. Conservative PM William Pitt (a very dour, crafty, Mitch McConnell-like Wadham) wants to hang onto it; Pitt's opponent, the reformer Charles James Fox (Carter in apocalyptic, insurgent Bernie Sanders mode), lusts for it; profligate, father-subjugated Prince of Wales (a marvelously spineless Everett) plots for it. As Hawthorne's magnificently interpreted George III runs amok while retaining shreds of his former authority, Bennett's Regency Crisis of 1788-89 swirls with intrigue, ensnaring the king's loyal wife Charlotte (Mirren) who wants things to be the way they used to be, her enabler, the unscrupulous Lady Pembroke (Donohoe) who seduces the King's naïve attendant Greville (Graves) to help shore up the status quo, and former clergyman turned king-tamer Dr. Willis (Holm) who, with all of the rigor but none of the niceties of *The King's Speech*, tapes the king's mouth shut when he acts up and brings him to heel so that, reasonably presentable again, the king may appear at Parliament's door to thwart both his son and Fox. Resplendent sets and intoxicating costumes add to the undertow mocking social conventions and the trappings of authority. A sobering irony: Greville and Dr. Willis learn it never turns out well to help a king when he's down.

AVANT-GARDE VERITE

HANS RICHTER: EVERYTHING TURNS, EVERYTHING REVOLVES (2013)

D: Dave Davidson. 60 mins. (First Run Features) 9/17

When the 20th century was young, Dada was king, and art began to migrate to film, German-born Hans Richter, surrealist painter and film experimenter extraordinaire, helped create and then, through successive decades until his death in Switzerland in 1976, continued to rule that



generally non-commercial (with the exception of Warhol) domain. This reverential doc revolves less around a cogent portrayal of a man and an artist than a nonstop parade of scholars, former students and admirers/collaborators telling us—with nary a single notable anecdote, poignant remembrance or connect-the-dots insight—how influential Richter is, all the while circling back to prized footage of the aged artist didactically chatting, his remarks not necessarily coordinated with the narrative. Context makes the artist. Richter, with his fierce commitment to art as a political/revolutionary movement, was formed, as was his generation, by revulsion of his World War I military experiences and his involvement in Dada painting, performance and publications. That context is barely explored. In 1940, fleeing Nazi Germany, Richter came to New York where, like many of his fellow displaced artists, he had a profound effect on emerging American artists who were coming into contact with transplanted European ideas and movements for the first time. Former CCNY students, now old men themselves, speak movingly of being impoverished and, through Richter, realizing their potential. Testimonials, however, do not pierce the enigma, and Richter—his times and his personality, not to mention his personal life—are also unexamined, brought up in nostalgic but not elucidating conversation like old photos without captions. Another thing you will not learn is the year of Richter's birth: 1888. Mention—and not much more—is made of Richter's two crowning achievements: his early success and the source of his reputation, the pioneering 1921 abstract film *Rhythmus 21*, and the 1947 must-see *Dreams That Money Can Buy* (VS #95), written by Richter who, believing in collaborative chemistry as the revolutionary ideal, relied on the acting of Max Ernst and the sketches/artwork of his friends Jean Cocteau, Paul Bowles, Fernand Leger, Alexander Calder and Marcel Duchamp. Legendary personalities inhabiting a legendary time cry out for texture; this film, unfortunately, is disappointingly superficial.

FILMING *FANTASMA* OR, DEBBIE ROCHON (AND THE SPIDERS FROM HELL)!

By Debbie Rochon

Back in February 2015 Matt Cloude had contacted me about doing a stylistic, giallo kind of Argento-esque film called *The Malevolent*. The project was in pre-production at the time he sent me the script. It was pretty cool, the character I was to play would be “The Lead” Carlina Cassaneli, psychiatrist to the young female ballerina who was on the verge of a complete meltdown. There was some question who the killer would end up being, and I really liked the exploration of the characters. So I agreed. Then nothing. I heard dead air for an entire year, so I thought this project was eaten up by the cinema wasteland demons.

Then...

Out of the darkness appeared Matt’s partner Brett Mullen. The bulk of the film had been shot by this time, and Brett was taking on the last few days to complete it. I thought it was mighty good of Brett to contact me, seeing Matt was out of the picture at this juncture and Brett certainly didn’t need to keep another person’s verbal contract with me. So after a bit of back and forth with AOL, everything was a go for a June 2016 shoot for Dr. Cassaneli.

I flew down to Greensboro, North Carolina, a scenic little college city sporting plenty of coffee shops and tragically hip bars for the young population that littered the streets. The hotel I stayed in was right on a main drag and was absolutely grand. The poster bed in my room was so high off the floor it came with a mini set of stairs to climb in order to reach the mattress. I packed my bag for the first day of shooting, which was going to be in Richmond, Virginia, where they had landed a kick-ass abandoned building for the movie’s climax. We drove down to the location the next morning and when we arrived the production coordinator gave the cast and crew the rundown for the place. Since it was very old and hadn’t been kept up over the years, we were warned of unstable floorboards, which was understandable, and of the snakes and venomous spiders that now called the building home. Everyone else there were locals and they didn’t bat an eye, but me? Even though I have lived for 30 years in NYC and been all over the world shooting movies, my phobia of spiders is kinda off the



Debbie Rochon joins cast, crew, and spiders (not visible here) during a *Fantasma* filming break.

charts. So I blurted out “POISONOUS SPIDERS???” Everyone turned around and looked at me like I was some crazy-ass diva. The production coordinator reassured me “Yes. I said poisonous spiders. So be careful.” FÜCK! Not poisonous spiders...anything but that.

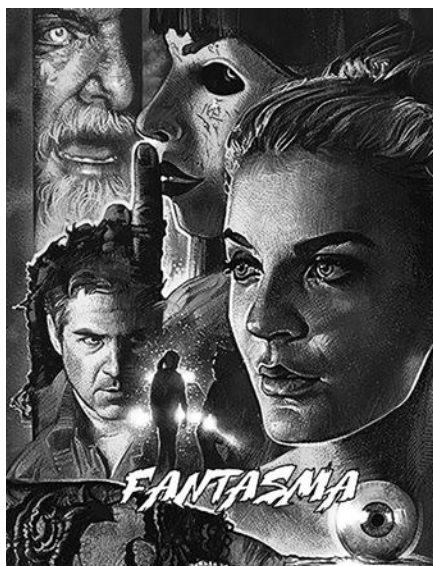
I took a moment, actually a lot of moments, before I went inside. I paced on a small piece of concrete (safe) and did my best to mentally prepare for this. If anyone asked, I was practicing my lines. I kept telling myself if everyone else can walk in that den of evil, then so can I. But every time I walked towards the entrance, I felt the solid shield of terror stop me and I went back to my 4x4 feet of safety—the concrete. At one point there was just no more delaying the horrid inevitable: walking into the location. I reached in my purse and popped one of my anti-anxiety flying pills I usually take before a flight (another phobia). While it didn’t make everything all better, it shaved enough of the edge off that I could go in the structure of hell and into makeup.

We got ready, shot the epic finale, which went extremely well. As soon as we were done and walking out of the location, the rain came down so hard, fast and heavy it must have been the spider gods lashing out at their inability to kill us all. I know this. Within mere seconds, we were all drenched to the bone. I stood by the car I was slated to ride in and no one was there. It was locked. I waited and waited and nothing. No one was coming out. I thought they were right behind me. Do I stand in the rain (it’s just water) or do I chance fate by going back into the spider den? I stood by the car. Some very kind extras offered to let me sit in their car, which I took them up on. I couldn’t make out who it was at first because of the cloud of pot smoke that filled the car like a

fog machine set on high. The windows were rolled up, natch, because of the rain. I was grateful to be in the car but was hoping I wouldn’t get high from the smoke because pot only makes me paranoid, not relaxed. I had enough paranoia for that day already. Last thing I needed was to start seeing spiders all over me that weren’t there. I didn’t have health insurance and a 14-day stay in a psych ward would have put me way over budget.

Finally the rain let up to a sprinkle and my car folks walked up the hill to the vehicle. They watched as I crawled out of the fume tank soaking wet and said, “It’s a four-hour drive, you’re gonna be so cold, you’re drenched.” I said, “Yeah, it’s okay.” I thought if I went into the whole story they would think I am nuts. Or at least know I am neurotic. Either way, the secret was going to stay with me as much as I could hide it.

The next shooting days were much calmer as there was no dealing with nature’s sick jokes. There were a few large cockroaches, which bothered some of the female crew, but I laughed since I had endured much worse than that living in NYC. I got my groove back, looking fairly badass laughing at the roaches. Sitting in the makeup chair, I had a lot of chuckles with the girls. They were really cool. They said they were shocked that I wasn’t a diva; apparently they had braced themselves for the worst. All was going pretty perfect, I’d say. The scenes were very enjoyable to shoot. Brett is a masterful filmmaker, and I have no doubt this movie will garner him much-deserved attention. He was funny, confident, knew what he wanted and had a super-relaxed vibe to his style. I really appreciated that.



There was only one small rift, which happens when you work with various artistic people. The lead actress was just phenomenal in her role. She had worked very closely with Brett for quite a while on the movie, so they had their own shorthand and she would come up with ideas for scenes, which I love to see and also do myself. I think some of the best work that gets laid down in a movie—unless you're a master screenwriter who has carved every word on paper for an important reason—comes from a certain amount of improvisation and changing things up while shooting the scenes to make them better. In this case, the actress had conversed with Brett about how our scene should go and they came up with a good variation on the script that improved it greatly. My issue was being told by another actress that she would say "this" and "that" and I should respond with "that" and in what way to do so. Mistake. One, I know how to respond in character in most improvised scenes, and two, it's never good form to tell your scene partner how to act. I mean, I am probably there for a reason: my experience. Although I was an outsider to a great degree, I am an actress and I know what I'm doing. Leave adjustments for the director to parlay to the actors. But explaining that to her did put a bit of a damper on our on-set "friendship." I still think she's pretty damn awesome. I hope she takes that lesson forward and learns from it. She's too great of a talent to fall into that particular trap.

After we wrapped and I went home, it wasn't too long before the title of the movie changed from **The Malevolent** to **Fantasma**. The latter has more of the Italian-style film feel that Brett created for the movie and the former has been used as a movie title quite a bit, so I think this was a damn good decision. We'll reserve **The Malevolent** title as the unofficial name of the spider kingdom we shot in. ☿

Rob Freese's MONDO ITALO!

WEB OF THE SPIDER (1971) ☿☿☿

D: Antonio Margheriti (as Anthony Dawson). Anthony Franciosa, Michelle Mercier, Klaus Kinski, Peter Carsten, Silvano Tranquilli, Karin Field. 93 mins. (Garagehouse Pictures) 11/17

On All Soul's Eve, American reporter Alan Foster (Franciosa) accepts a challenge from a drunken Edgar Allan Poe (Kinski) to spend one night in Blackwood Castle. Poe hints at spirits, but Foster doesn't believe in the supernatural. Foster quickly finds the castle inhabited by a cast of eccentric characters, including Elisabeth Blackwood (Mercier), Dr. Carmus (Carsten) and sinister Julia (Field). Because he doesn't believe in the supernatural, Foster is slow to pick up on the fact that all the residents are ghosts and they need his blood to exist another year. Lots of melodramatic flashbacks ensue as Elisabeth's indiscretions are revealed, along with much murder and mayhem. This was Margheriti's color remake of his earlier gothic chiller, 1964's **Castle of Blood** (VS #98). Most fans seem to prefer the earlier film, partly for its atmospheric black-and-white photography but mostly for legendary horror icon Barbara Steele's turn as Elisabeth Blackwood. The players are all serviceable here, with Kinski's portrayal of Poe drunkenly memorable. Franciosa is game as Foster, and Carsten kills a real snake to try and prove a point that doesn't make a whole lot of sense. Garagehouse Pictures' Blu-ray is a beautifully remastered widescreen edition that totally blows all the previous budget DVD releases out of the water. Crisp, clean and sharp, the film oozes atmosphere that will pretty much drip through your TV screen. Extras include multiple commentaries, two German Super 8 movie digests, a Margheriti trailer reel, deleted scene, a standard definition version of the uncut Italian version, art gallery and trailers for more Garagehouse Pictures releases. **Web** is a fun, atmospheric gothic spook show, the type that hasn't been made in decades, from a real master of the genre. ☿



FREESE FRAME!

DEMON WIND (1990) ☿1/2

D: Charles Philip Moore. Eric Larson, Francine Lapensee, Rufus Norris, Sherry Leigh, Lynn Clark, Richard Gabai. 98 mins. (Vinegar Syndrome) 8/17

Cory (Larson) heads into the country to his grandparents' dilapidated cabin where they were murdered, years earlier, when his father was just a baby. His grandmother may have been a witch who fought demons. He involves all his friends in his mission, mainly to provide the film with victims for some kind of body count when it decides to stop being boring. Once the assembled cheeseheads are at the cabin, their vehicles all die and a malevolent fog keeps them trapped on the premises. It should be mentioned that the cabin is missing three of its four walls, so when they are inside they are actually in a different dimension. Soon, pus-spewing demonoids start chewing through the cast. There's an ancient book that offers a way to kill the demons and also reminds you that **The Evil Dead** did all this so much better. To its credit, **Demon Wind** does make you think. You think about what time it is. You think about the clothes in the dryer that need to be folded. You think about the pizza rolls in the freezer. You think about all the better movies you could be watching. While I appreciate the old-school prosthetics and latex slinging, the movie itself never generates any real life as the entire cast seems to sleepwalk through the derivative storyline. Some of the dialogue will have you banging your head against the wall to make sure your ears are working. There's a non-ending tacked on that threatens a sequel, which at one time was planned but never happened. Why Vinegar Syndrome felt this film was deserving of a 2K restoration and such a lavish release when better dumb creature features like **Blood Beach** and **Devil Fish** still haven't been released in any digital format, I have no idea. I think this is probably a film that is best appreciated by people who were kids and remember renting it at Blockbuster for a friend's sleepover, which, no doubt, would make for a fun viewing. Extras include multiple interviews, trailer, still gallery and reversible cover artwork. For whatever fan base is out there waiting for it, **Demon Wind** is here. ☿

—Rob Freese



The Phantom's JOY OF SETS

FILM FINDS

Criterion Collection scores the season's major headline with its long-anticipated double-disc Blu-ray special edition of George Romero's 1968 fright classic **Night of the Living Dead** (\$39.95). The label's release of the UCLA Archives 4K restoration that preemed at NYC's Museum of Modern Art in October arrives with a treasure trove of bonus material, leading with a previously unseen **Night of Anubis** work-print edit of the film. Also included are a program with filmmakers Guillermo del Toro, Frank Darabont and Robert Rodriguez; another program with **NOTLD** co-screenwriter John Russo discussing the production house where the film's creators got their collective start; a 16mm dailies reel; two audio commentaries featuring Romero, Russo, actor/producer Karl Hardman, actress Judith O'Dea and others originally recorded in 1994; new behind-the-scenes featurettes; a new interview with actor/producer Russ Streiner and soundman Gary Streiner; archival interviews with Romero and actors Duane Jones and Judith Ridley; an expanded exclusive Duane Jones audio interview conducted by Tim Ferrante and containing over four minutes of new material; trailer, radio & TV spots; and more.

Criterion likewise lavishes much TLC on Carl Theodor Dreyer's surreal 1932 black-and-white classic **Vampyr** (\$39.95 Blu-ray Special Edition). Designed as a celluloid "daydream" (though nightmare might be closer to the mark), Dreyer's experimental odyssey follows the fortunes of a young occult seeker (Julian West) adrift in an eerie shadowscape outside Paris. Criterion presents a restored edition of the original German-language version, with English subtitles for the sparse dialogue. Bonus material includes an alternate version with English text, Jergen Roos's career-spanning documentary **Carl Th. Dreyer**, audio commentary by film scholar Tony Rayns, a 2008 video essay by Casper Tybjerg covering **Vampyr's** influences, a radio broadcast featuring Dreyer, an original screenplay book, and a booklet featuring critical essays.

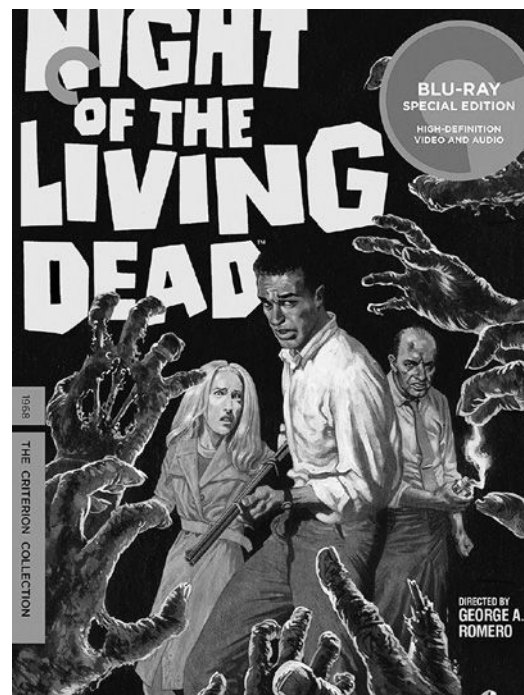
Criterion also issues **Monty Python** alum Terry Gilliam's debut solo feature, the surreal medieval-set romp **Jabberwocky** (\$39.95 Blu-ray), starring fellow Pythonite Michael Palin and a sterling cast of British character thespians. Extras include an audio commentary by Gilliam and Palin, a new making-of documentary, an interview with creature designer Valerie Charlton, select storyboards, essay and more.

In the One-Stop Shocking Dept. Mill Creek Entertainment presents a veritable genre bonanza with its 9-disc **Horror Hall of Fame** (\$49.95), containing 26 fright films. The **Boris Karloff 6 Movie Collection** concentrates on the scare master's 1930s and '40s Columbia Pictures output, assembling **The Black Room**, with BK as good and evil twins, **The Man They Could Not Hang**, **The Man with Nine Lives, Before I Hang**, the offbeat **The Devil Commands**, and the frightcom **The Boogie Man Will Get You**. The **Vincent Price Collection** corrals a quintet of titles—**Shock**, **The Bat**, William Castle's **House on Haunted Hill**, **The Last Man on Earth**, and the obscure South African western **The Jackals**. **Hammer Films Collection Vol. 1** offers **Creatures the World Forgot**, Tallulah Bankhead in **Die! Die! My Darling**, **Never Take Candy from a Stranger**, **Maniac**, Peter Cushing in **Revenge of Frankenstein**, the brilliant suspense **The Snorkel**, while Vol. 2 has **Curse of the Mummy's Tomb**, **The Gorgon**, **Scream of Fear**, **Stop Me Before I Kill!** and **The Two Faces of Dr. Jekyll**. The **Classic Horror Collection** assembles Arch O'Broler's post-apocalyptic **Five**, Vincent Price as **The Mad Magician**, **Man Who Turned to Stone**, and Christopher Lee in **Terror of the Tongs**.

Kino Lorber looks to entertain espionage lovers with **OSS 117: Five Film Collection** (\$59.95 5-disc Blu-ray). The set collects the entire quintet of spy adventures showcasing suave secret agent OSS 117, beginning with two films starring Kerwin (**The Seventh Voyage of Sinbad**) Matthews in the title role, **OSS 117 Is Unleashed** (1963) and **OSS 117: Panic in Bangkok** (1964). Frederick Stafford assumes the lead in a pair of further installments, **OSS 117: Mission for a Killer** (1965) and **OSS 117: Mission to Tokyo** (1966). **Psycho** alum John Gavin takes over in the fifth and final entry, **OSS 117—Double Agent** (1968), costarring Curt Jurgens. The films are presented in French with English subtitles

TELE-VIDEO

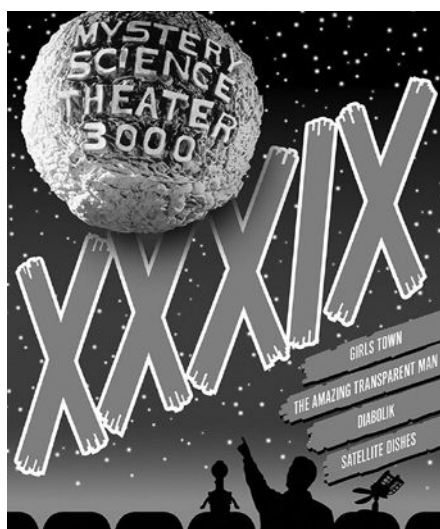
Acorn Media keeps busy on the U.K. criminal investigation front with a slew of fresh sets. Ex-**X-File** Gillian Anderson, as Detective Superintendent Stella Gibson, continues her suspenseful cat-and-mouse games with serial killer Paul Spector in **The Fall Series 3** (2-disc Blu-ray \$39.99), a six-episode set complemented by a behind-the-scenes featurette, deleted scenes and photo gallery. Acorn also issues the same thespians in the gala 17-episode **The Fall: Complete Collection** (6-disc Blu-ray \$69.99), likewise enhanced by behind-the-scenes featurettes, deleted scenes and photo galleries. Thandie Newton heads a team on the trail of another serial killer whose guilt may be in doubt in **Line of Duty Series 4** (2-DVD \$39.99), based on Jed Mercurio's police drama and costarring Martin Compston and Vicky McClure. Rural Scotland's scenic landscape serves as the setting for **Loch Ness**



Series 1 (2-disc Blu-ray \$49.99); Laura Fraser stars as Annie Redford, a small-town detective who tackles her first murder case. Extras include cast interviews, behind-the-scenes featurettes, and a photo gallery. Anna Friel portrays an emotionally distraught divorcee who returns to her former job as a London Detective Sergeant involved in a case that turns increasingly personal in **Marcella Season One** (2-DVD \$49.99).

Also on the mystery front, Acorn reels back to the beginning with **Midsomer Murders: John Barnaby's First Cases** (7-DVD \$79.99). The set assembles 14 feature-length episodes starring Neil Dudgeon as Detective Chief Inspector John Barnaby, who's aided in his investigations by Jason Hughes as Detective Sergeant Ben Jones; bonus material includes select audio commentary with actor Dudgeon and director Alex Pillai, behind-the-scenes segments, interviews, and a biography of Sykes the dog. Brenda Blethyn returns as Detective Chief Inspector Vera Stanhope in **Vera Set 7** (4-DVD \$59.99), tackling four new feature-length assignments in scenic rural Northumberland, with a little help from Kenny Doughty as Detective Sergeant Aiden Healy. Montreal officers Jared Keeso and Adrian Holmes reunite for **19-2 Season 4** (2-DVD \$49.99), the final season for the award-winning cop drama; the set contains all eight Season 4 episodes. Richard Roxburgh and Danielle Cormack headline in the Aussie legal dramedy **Rake, Series 4** (3-DVD \$39.99).

Acorn celebrates top mystery weaver Agatha Christie with a trio of new releases. On the heels of the big-screen iteration of the venerable tale, Acorn issues the TV adaptation of **Murder on the Orient Express** (\$19.99), with David Suchet reprising his role as Belgian shamus Hercule Poirot, and featuring Jessica Chastain, Hugh Bonneville and Barbara Hershey.



The Best of Agatha Christie Volume One assembles three TV movies—**And Then There Were None**, **Five Little Pigs** and **Death on the Nile**—while **Volume Two** (2-DVD \$39.99 each) offers **The Witness for the Prosecution**, **Three Act Tragedy** and **Halloween Party**, along with bonus interviews and behind-the-scenes featurettes.

On the dramatic front, Rodger Corser plays a Sydney-based heart surgeon forced to retreat to his remote hometown, where life is anything but tranquil, in **The Heart Guy Series 1** (3-DVD \$49.99). Also in Oz, Marta Dusseldorp returns as senior crown prosecutor **Janet King Series 3: Playing Advantage** (3-DVD \$49.99), cast into a web of intrigue following the death of a key witness in a murder case; the set arrives with behind-the-scenes featurettes and a photo gallery. Acorn goes the sci-fi route with the Uncut U.K. Edition of **Humans 2.0** (Blu-ray \$39.99), a series about synthetic humans (or synths) and the persecution they face; the 2-disc set contains all 8 episodes plus featurettes.

Shout! Factory issues what looks to be its final **Mystery Science Theater 3000** set, **Vol. XXXIX** (4-disc DVD \$59.97), lining up three Mike Nelson-hosted episodes (where he receives invaluable assists from his riffing 'bot buddies Tom Servo and Crow T. Robot), including two of the series' funniest, Edgar G. Ulmer's **The Amazing Transparent Man** (1960) and producer Albert Zugsmith's all-star jaw-dropper **Girls Town** (1959). Completing the trio is the gang's last episode, Mario Bava's **Diabolik**, also the subject of a behind-the-scenes extra (**Showdown in Eden Prairie: Their Final Experiment**). Other bonus featurettes include **Beyond Transparency**, **Chuck Love and the Anatomy of a Theme**, **Behind the Screen: Daniel Griffith on Ballyhoo**, and the bonus disc **Satellite Dishes**, a collection of unreleased host segments for unissued episodes. The set also includes theatrical trailers and four mini-posters by longtime resident **MST3K** artist Steve Vance. ☘

Dan Cziraky's ANIMATION NATION

BATMAN VS. TWO-FACE (2017) ☘☘☘
D. Rick Morales. Adam West, Burt Ward, William Shatner, Julie Newmar. 72 mins. (Warner Home Entertainment) 10/17

After the stunning success of 2016's **Batman: Return of the Caped Crusaders**, which saw the 1966 **Batman** TV series characters reunited in animated form and voiced by original cast members West (Batman), Ward (Robin), and Newmar (Catwoman), WB immediately announced plans for a follow-up feature. **Batman vs. Two-Face** introduces the villain Two-Face, one of the few evildoers from the comics not used in the original TV series. Gotham City District Attorney Harvey Dent (Shatner, animated in character à la 1966) is disfigured on his left side after an experiment to drain all the evil out of Gotham's villains by scientist Dr. Hugo Strange (Jim Ward) goes awry. Becoming the villainous Two-Face, he goes on a crime spree until finally captured by Batman and Robin. Dent's boyhood friend Bruce Wayne (aka Batman) finances facial reconstructive surgery for Dent. Pronounced cured, he is reinstated to a lowly assistant position in the DA's office. Meanwhile, King Tut (Wally Wingert) and Bookworm (Jeff Bergman) commit crimes that seem to indicate that Two-Face is involved, even though Dent appears normal again. Robin becomes suspicious of Dent, but Batman chalks it up to jealousy over their friendship. Catwoman (Newmar), tired of romancing Batman from afar with three more years on her sentence, breaks out of prison. Once it becomes obvious that someone has, in fact, picked up the mantle of Two-Face, the Dynamic Duo is led into a trap that allows all of Gotham's top criminals to bid on learning the true identities of the Caped Crusaders. Can Batman and Robin escape this fiendish plot? And, who is this mysterious new Two-Face? A nod to original **Batman** series fans includes the casting of Lee Meriwether as Two-Face's moll, Lucilee Diamond. (Meriwether assumed the role of Catwoman in **Batman: The Movie** when Newmar became unavailable.) West, who completed recording his dialogue in October 2016, passed away in June 2017, and the film is dedicated to his memory. The Blu-ray edition has an extra scene referencing a current popular comics and film character from the Batman universe. Other extras include **The Wonderful World of Burt Ward, Adam West Tribute Panel Comic-Con International 2017**, and other featurettes. While **BvTF** hits most of the right notes, especially when it comes to finding voice actors to sound like departed cast members such as Caesar Romero, Frank Gorshin, and Victor Buono, it drags whenever they insist on sticking Aunt Harriet into a scene. Overall, quite a bit of Bat-goodness to go around, and a fond farewell to West, who personified Batman for 50 years. ☘

Nancy Naglin's From the Business Desk...

Many years ago as a student in Montreal, the great McGill University Film Society announced the showing of a horror film. From its brief description, I deduced it was a silly film, just another creep-show romp in the style of '50s horror movies. I wasn't at all interested but didn't want to stay home, either. I loved the Film Society, the auditorium where the hippest crowd gathered, the anticipation for films like **Magnum Force**, **La Jete**, **Hiroshima Mon Amour**, **The 400 Blows**, **The Trip**, **Billy Jack**, even the hard-to-take Stan Brakhage. The mood was upbeat, the crowd jocular, as we prepared to see a film that was a hoot and have a few laughs. Then we see Johnny wandering—in then-novel docu-reality mode—through a cemetery, ragging on his less than confident sister Barbara, both of them chased by the living dead, and are struck numb. Younger viewers may be immune to the nuances of **The Night of the Living Dead**'s pioneering, in-your-face mix of horror, civil rights, a black leading man taking charge and bossing around a white female, protest and Vietnam, but the impact of that first viewing of Romero's masterpiece has not lessened through the decades. "It's only a movie," the boy next to me kept telling his anguished girlfriend. He looked terrified. On the way home, leaves rattling in the gutter followed me, filling me with dread. The film awakened every anxiety. Romero, wittingly or not, distilled political horror, creating out of old tropes an entirely new genre so adaptable it lives continually, like *Dracula*. And so celebrating our 25th year, we honor the modern zombie progenitor, the incomparable George A. Romero, the hippest political director in the room, who I barely noted in the credits but in subsequent years became a friend.

Twenty-five years is a long time at anything. We recognize with appreciation and thanks all our subscribers, in particular, the loyal cohorts who write to tell us they have been with us since the start. Together, we have seen formats and hardware come and go; VHS is now collectible and streaming is here. The biggest challenge facing **VideoScope** now is the decline of newsstand. Now more than ever is the time to support the magazine by subscribing. Please renew or start a subscription today; please consider a gift subscription for those friends and relatives who share your love of cinema or who may "borrow" your copy. As always, heartfelt thanks go to our loyal and supportive advertisers. Art director Kevin Hein again deserves praise for outstanding cover designs; his graphic arts and technological expertise correct production obstacles to bring **VideoScope** to publication on time, every time. Thanks! Vampires, zombies, horror and humor, art-house, sci-fi, westerns and noirs, we pledge to keep bringing you the best in genre the untamed **VideoScope** way. ☘

JAWS, JERKS & AMAZON WOMEN! WRITER/DIRECTOR CARL GOTTLIEB As Told To Terry & Tiffany DuFoe

Versatile multi-hyphenate Carl Gottlieb began his long showbiz career working the improv trade with the influential comedy troupe The Committee before joining the TV comedy ranks, writing for such cutting-edge shows as **The Smothers Brothers Comedy Hour**. His film endeavors include co-scripting **The Jerk**, the satire that launched Steve Martin's lengthy movie career, and the Richard Pryor showcase **Which Way Is Up?** Carl Gottlieb's highest-profile and perhaps most surprising credit, though, had to be co-writing (and acting in) an enduring, if largely non-comedic horror classic, Steven Spielberg's **Jaws**, and following that assignment by penning **The Jaws Log**, which remains the best-selling film book of all-time. Cult-movie fans, meanwhile, especially appreciate his work on the collaborative 1987 film and TV sendup **Amazon Women on the Moon**, where he scripted several segments and directed the **Son of the Invisible Man** episode, with Ed Begley, Jr. in the title role. Our dynamic dad/daughter duo, Terry & Tiffany DuFoe, recently enjoyed a wide-ranging chat with Carl Gottlieb, the results of which follow forthwith.

TERRY DUFOE As the writer of the best-selling paperback movie book of all time, **The Jaws Log**, I'm sure you've been asked this before: Are you afraid to go into the water?

CARL GOTTLIEB I don't like deep water, to tell you the truth. If I'm at sea, I would rather not be in a small boat. Not that I'm fearful of the fish. It's just deep water makes me uncomfortable.

TD I know a lot of **Jaws** was factual because you had some actual oceanographers working with you as consultants and filmed some of the footage of real sharks. But people expect you to be an expert and you've clearly said that you're not an expert on sharks.

CG I did a lot of research at the time and I've read as much as any popular non-science reader can read about sharks. Over the years since the film was released, I've been exposed to a lot of shark stuff. I've done shows at aquariums and Sea World. I've been immersed because people just assume that I'm interested, so they tell me all kinds of inter-

esting facts. You just acquire a certain knowledge. It's like actors who play cops on long-running television shows. Pretty soon they know as much about being a policeman as the cop does because they're exposed to it. People are constantly telling them stories about their real-life experiences, so you pick that stuff up over time. So now I'm as expert as a layman can be about something as technical as ichthyology.

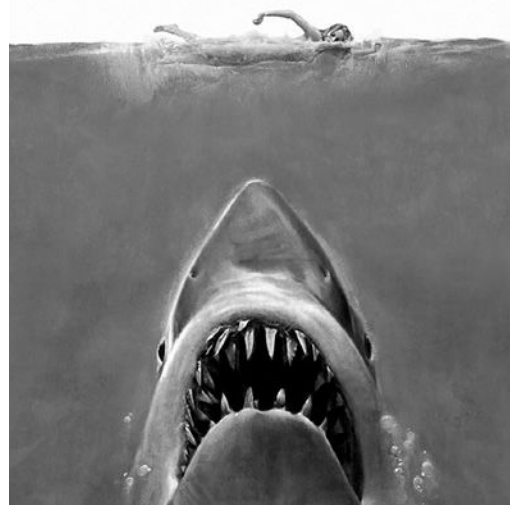
TD I want to start with the beginning of your career. You began by writing comedy bits for **The Smothers Brothers Comedy Hour**, correct? How did you get into writing? Was it something you always wanted to do growing up or is it one of those things where you kind of fell into it?

CG No, I was *always* a writer. Even in grammar school I excelled in English, and in high school I won a prize at graduation for composition. In high school I edited the yearbook and in college I wrote for the humor magazine. I was an editor, so I always had a way with words. I was always comfortable in the company of words. I always wanted to be in theater or show business, basically. I was lucky enough to get jobs that were in show business. My very first salaried job when I got out of college was writing for a movie industry trade paper that serviced exhibitors and theater owners, so I got the theater owners' point of view on movies. Then I became a stage manager at a very successful improvisational satirical revue in San Francisco called The Committee back in 1963. It was kind of a cousin to Second City and it was a very successful show. First I was a stage manager, then I was a director, and then I became an actor in the company. We were local stars. The show was a big hit in San Francisco. So much so that we came to Los Angeles to do the show here and we were on stage every night being funny—six nights a week, two shows a night—and most people in town came to see us because we were well reviewed. Among the audiences we had were the Smothers Brothers and the producers of the show. They had already picked up one of the actors to be on **The Smothers Brothers** show. Then they were assembling some writing talent and because I was glib and funny on stage they said, "Well, you know, you could be a television comedy writer!" I said, "Okay!"

TD **The Smothers Brothers Comedy Hour** was so ahead of its time, before **Saturday Night Live**, with political and satirical comedy. But they were come down on by the censors and the studio because of that. With you being the one putting the words in the boys' mouths, how frustrating was that for you?

CG Well, you know, it certainly was not the freedom that we enjoyed on stage where we could basically say anything, including four-letter words, but if you had to be doing comedy in television, especially political satire, you

JAWS



couldn't have picked a better place than **The Smothers Brothers Show** because they permitted as much as the censors and the network would let them. Even then they pushed the limits of what people could say and it was kind of exciting because it was cutting edge. It wasn't frustrating. We played games! You'd throw in a few extra four-letter words and the censors would jump up and down and say, "Take that out!" but you would use that as a screen to hide slightly more subtle subversive political jokes. You would write stuff for them to see and cut, just so they would leave the other stuff alone. The good stuff!

TD You won an Emmy Award for your work on **The Smothers Brothers Comedy Hour**. That was very much a group collaboration between you and your fellow writers. Who were some of the other writers on the show? I understand there were some names that everyone might recognize?

CG Absolutely! The Smothers Brothers had struggled along for a couple of years with some old-school television producers and the contract with their producers was up after two years and then they basically owned their own show, so they could do anything they wanted. So they said, "Let's hire the people that we like to laugh at and laugh with." They looked for comedy performers and performance artists and song writers. The writers room included me, Steve Martin, Rob Reiner, a comedian named Murray Roman, a songwriter named John Hartford who wrote "Gentle on My Mind," a poet and performance artist named Mason Williams, and Lorenzo Music, who created **The Newhart Show** and **Rhoda** later. Lorenzo was my writing partner. And a few other fairly adventurous writers with no previous network credibility, but plenty of comedy smarts and satirical insights. It was quite the writers room!

“After *Jaws* I was afraid I was going to get typecast as a horror writer or kind of an action thriller guy.”
Carl Gottlieb

TD You were so chummy with Steve Martin that you even stayed at his house and fed his cat when he was away. Is that right?

CG Yeah! Where did you find that out?!

TD We have our ways!

CG I was looking for a place to get out of town to be able to work at. I usually like to write in solitude. Steve had a house in Aspen, Colorado, and he was on the road. I offered to house-sit and feed his cat—and so I did! I got some good writing done there, too!

*TD What was it like working with Steve writing *The Jerk*? Why wasn't he in *The Jerk, Too*?*

*CG I don't think he had an appetite for it. He did it once. He did it as well as he could. We did *The Jerk* and that was the beginning of his stadium concert tours and the *Saturday Night Live* appearances. You know, “A couple of wild and crazy guys!” So he had moved on. He didn't want to do the same character again. We didn't think there was a sequel in it and to tell you the truth I've never seen it. I got money for it because of the original. I've never seen *Jaws 4* either.*

*TD You did *The Smothers Brothers* and you wrote for *The Bob Newhart Show*. You wrote for *The Flip Wilson Special*. You wrote for *The Odd Couple*. Everything that you had done up till *Jaws* was all comedy.*

*CG Yeah! After *Jaws* I was afraid I was going to get typecast as a horror writer or kind of an action thriller guy. I was more interested in making people laugh, so the very next picture I did after *Jaws* was a Richard Pryor comedy. That kind of, luckily, pulled me back from the brink of writing about renegade fish or bears...or goldfish. I was actually offered a movie called *Paws* about a bear that terrorizes the Pacific Northwest and they won't want to tell the tourists.*

*TD There was *Grizzly*, *Piranha*...*

CG There's nothing like Hollywood when it comes to catching a trend!

TD I wanted to ask you about Richard Pryor. Richard was a genius, but he also was pretty moody. How did you find him? Did you see him ever get into any depression?

*CG I had the good fortune of working with him in both his Dr. Jekyll and his Mr. Hyde moments. When he was with Pam [Grier] and we were writing *Which Way Is Up?* he was on a self-improvement regimen. He was working out. He was trying to avoid drugs and alcohol. Pam made sure he ate healthy and exercised and played tennis and really took care of himself. He was clear and funny and all of those things. And then when he fell off the wagon, as he did periodically—I guess it was a manic depressive cycle or manic destructive cycle—then he would be doing drugs and alcohol. He'd be erratic and occasionally violent and unpredictable. His act never suffered. He was always brilliant to watch onstage, but his offstage behavior became difficult. Before *Which Way Is Up?* I worked with him on two of those Flip Wilson specials. On one of them he was in good shape. Then six months later when we did the next one, the third one in the series, he picked a fight with an NBC page. There were fisticuffs backstage during the taping of the special. It was a big deal. I intervened and for my good deed I was rewarded by having to go to depositions with three sets of lawyers—one for the network, one for Richard and an insurance company, and one for the page who was suing Richard for hitting him. It was an adventure.*

*TD When you worked on *Which Way Is Up?* were you concerned with the tone? The film was comedy, but it was a very socially conscious movie. It did have a lot of political overtones in it,*

*CG In my first professional comedy job with The Committee, we were a satirical political theater. We thrived on that kind of humor. *Which Way Is Up?* is based on an Italian film by Lina Wertmüller, one of the great women directors of the 1960s. She did a movie—the American title was *The Seduction of Mimi*. It was a very political film. When the American producer who bought it wanted to Americanize *Mimi*, who in the Italian film was a factory worker in the north of Italy, the corresponding job for him would've been a migrant farm worker. Since Cesar Chavez and the whole farm workers union movement was current and big agriculture was fighting it and Cesar Chavez was a hero, it seemed natural to use all the socialist workers' imperatives in Lina's script and see how many of those we could squeeze into an American comedy. I think we got a lot done in that way.*

*TD Steven Spielberg knew you were funny. That's kind of how you got involved with reworking *Jaws*, because he wanted that comedy punch.*

CG Oh yeah! He had the script. He knew he was probably going to direct it and he was very un-



Scripter Carl Gottlieb braves the waves in publicity pic.

sure about the populist elements in the film. It was a pretty straightforward adaptation of the novel. A men-against-the-sea kind of a drama with this big shark. At the time that he was prepping the movie and agonizing over the script, I was working as a story editor on *The Odd Couple* with Jack Klugman and Tony Randall. I was doing comedy every week and Steven said, “Can you get away? If you can do a part in the movie, you'll be on the set. You'll be around. We can talk. You can help out with some of the humanizing elements.” I said, “Yeah, sure.” So I went through the casting process at Universal and they agreed with Steven that I could play the part of Meadows, the publisher of the newspaper, a co-conspirator with the mayor. I got the part as an actor in the movie first. Then later, when they were just weeks away from starting shooting, Steven was adamant that the script had to be revised and I was Johnny on the spot. I was going to be on the set anyway as an actor. I had some very definite ideas about the script which I expressed in a memo just between me and Steven, but he showed it to the producers. The result was they said, “Well, can you do a dialogue polish?” That was how they phrased it. That turned into a complete re-write that began two weeks before principal photography. It continued right on through the last of the talking scenes. When there was no more dialogue to shoot, I was finished and then Steven had to stay there for another two months with just the three actors and the fish.

TD Did you have any consultation with Peter Benchley at all?

“The closer they got to the set, where they were stepping into character, they would start to be pissy and sarcastic with each other.”

Carl Gottlieb on Richard Dreyfuss and Robert Shaw

CG It was part of his deal when he sold the rights to the novel that he got the right to do a first draft of the screenplay. Not being a screenwriter, he wrote a screenplay that wasn't very useful. So they hired another screenwriter who had screenwriting experience and also playwright experience named Howard Sackler, who wrote a couple of drafts which were enough for the studio to say, “Okay, this looks like a movie. Go make the movie.” Steven, who actually had to make the movie, was thinking to himself, “Oh God, I don't really want to make this movie. Not the way it is now. It's got to be funny. It's got to be more human. It's got to be more suspenseful.” So he got a friend, me, to come in and do the writing while he was directing. We'd talk about the film every night. We'd talk about it on the set. If I wasn't on the set as an actor, I was back in the cabin we shared, writing. It was a fabulous collaboration because I knew exactly what it was he needed.

TD Over the years there have been many stories that have circulated, not only about troubles on the set, troubles with Bruce the shark, but also frustrations from Richard Dreyfuss. It sounded like he hated the movie! What was it really like on set?

CG Okay, well you have to realize the first script that the studio approved, that Steven did not want to make, was offered to Dreyfuss because he was a hot young actor and he said, “This is a movie that I would rather see than be in.” And he passed. So now I'm with Steven in a hotel room in Boston and we don't have a Hooper, and we don't have Quint. We only have Roy Scheider, and the movie starts in three weeks. Now I know Dreyfuss from the comedy world. He was part of an improvisational comedy group with Rob Reiner and Larry Bishop and David Arkin and Marj Dusay. They had a little comedy troupe in L.A. that was similar to The Committee. We knew each other. We were pals. I said to Steve, “Well, you know, we really want Richard to do this, don't we?” And he said, “Yes, he'd be great as Hooper.” So I found where Richard was. He happened to be, luckily for us, in New York. I reached out to him and I said, “Hey, you gotta come up.” He said, “I'm not going to do that movie.” I said, “Come up. I'm on it now. I wasn't on it before. I'm writing on it. Steven would love you to come up. Just meet with him. Just hear his ideas.” Richard took a

shuttle up to Boston and walked into the hotel room looking just like Hooper. He had a scruffy beard, the rimless glasses, a blue knit watch cap, and Steven looked at him and said, “All right, first of all, don't change a thing, this is what you're going to be wearing for weeks!” I said, “Look, there's going to be laughs in there. It's going to be different. You and Quint are going to have a great relationship. You'll have conflict going.” So we talked him into doing the movie and they offered him a lot of money. More than he was used to making. Now we're on the set and here comes Robert Shaw and he and Richard have their differences. Shaw is an experienced Shakespearean actor and a novelist and a playwright. Dreyfuss is the new kid on the block, a Beverly Hills rich kid, and doesn't have the depth of experience that Shaw has, but they're costars! They're getting the same billing and their characters are antagonistic. So off-camera, the further they got from the set, the more they were friends. The closer they got to the set, where they were stepping into character, they would start to be pissy and sarcastic with each other. Then you've got the creative tension between actors that was translated perfectly into the tension between the characters. You had the Dionysian man—impulsive and instinctive Quint. You had the rational man—the oceanographer, thinking, Aristotelian mind in Hooper. And then you had everyman in the Scheider character, who is like all of us, in the middle, who has to mediate between these two strong forces. The chemistry worked fine. It's a great triangle, almost like a love triangle.

TD My favorite scene has got to be when the three of them are comparing scars. It almost came off like an improv. Was it you that wrote that scene?

CG Yeah. Everybody was worried about that long speech, Quint's speech, which is something Howard Sackler brought to the screenplay. It's not in the novel. It doesn't exist before Sackler's drafts. It was a huge monologue. It's like three pages of dialogue. Very daunting for an actor. Shaw was pretty sure he could do it, but we were all nervous about pulling it off. We knew that even though it was a valorous speech, it's in the middle of a whole scene which is very important to the movie because it's like the lull before the storm. On my script notes I used to call it “just before the battle mother.” The scene, if you think about it in cinematic terms, it's like those scenes in war movies in the trenches before they go over the top before the attack at dawn. It's like the last moment of quiet where the guys are writing home, they're getting their things in order, the guy who's going to get killed the next morning is telling him about how when he gets out of the Army he's going to marry his girlfriend...you know, all that stuff. That was the purpose of that scene. To let the audience relax, identify with the characters, understand once and for all what their roles are, their history, where they're coming from and then...BANG! The shark hits the ship below deck and then you're off and running for



the next day. But that was all scripted between the guys, yes.

TD Some of the fan questions for you we've seen online include detailed questions like: “When Hooper attaches that blinking tracking device to the first barrel, what is that? Was it a tracking device and was there a written scene left out where Hooper comes back to that device?”

CG In answer, no, that wasn't a tracker. It was a beacon. The reason he puts it on the barrel is so that if the barrel surfaces, they'll be able to spot it at night or even in an overcast day. The flashing will let them know that the barrel is on the surface. If the barrel is nearby, then the shark is nearby. Additionally, it was like a visual. That's why he had it. It was the scientist in him that brought that particular gear and it was the scientist in him that hooks it to the harpoon and attaches it to the fish. But there was no tracking, no. It was just a beacon.

TD There is an old maritime superstition that two shooting stars is a sailor's omen for a death on the ship. There is a rumor about the two shooting stars in the night sky in *Jaws* that the first was real and Spielberg animated the second.

CG After 40 years I've heard it all. The film has been analyzed way beyond our poor powers, but as Joe Alves is fond of pointing out when anybody asks, for a long time everybody thought the first one was an accident and the second one was deliberate, but the truth is they're both deliberate. The scenes in the boat at sea were shot day for night. No shooting star would've ever been visible during the filming process. We shot during the day.

TD Wasn't there an issue in editing when Bruce the shark eats Quint? Was that not cut and then restored later because of being graphic?

“When the picture was submitted to the ratings board, they said, ‘Well, this is too violent for kids.’”

Carl Gottlieb

CG Well, the problem we had was there was a ratings board. The studio very much wanted a PG rating so people under 17 could go see it. In those days, I guess there was just a G, a P and an X. There wasn't a whole lot of subtlety in the ratings system. In order to get the film approved for younger audiences, there's no sex in it, so people were concerned about the blood and the gore. There were two bloody scenes or graphic scenes. One is the guy who is sailing a small boat in the estuary and gets knocked off the boat and eaten and his severed leg drops through the frame. That was the first horrible thing. And then of course, Quint's death. When the picture was submitted to the ratings board, they said, “Well, this is too violent for kids.” Then there was this big negotiation. Can we show the leg? Yes, but you can't show the severed joint. Well, can we show the joint if it's in the film for 11 frames? “That's too short,” said Steven, “It's got to be in for 20 frames.” Then the censors said no and it was a negotiation on how many frames the bloody leg could show in. We settled on a number that is the shot that's in the film. Quint's death was always going to be bloody and gory and explicit. That was always in the script. There may have been an edit or two between previews and the final release version, but for the most part the film was released as cut. As edited. And it won an Academy Award for the editor, Verna Fields.

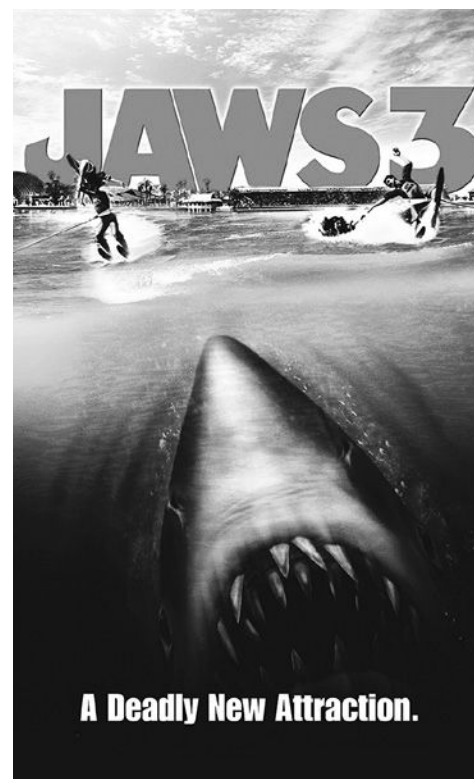
TD I understand that *The Jaws Log* was a rushed writing production as well. But it obviously was very successful. How did *The Jaws Log* come about?

CG In those days, the studios were first beginning to understand the value of marketing and ancillary products. Lunchboxes. T-shirts. Coffee mugs. There aren't any of those things for the classic movies of the 1950s and 1960s or 1930s. Nobody made *Gone With the Wind* T-shirts in 1939. So they were just getting into that with *Jaws*. There were documentaries, the “making of” a movie. So anyway, the idea was MCA/Universal had developed a publishing division and they wanted to do a nice coffee table book—the making of *Jaws* from three different points of view: the director's, the producer's and the novelist's, Peter Benchley. Steven said, “Would you mind writing my third of it? I'm busy preparing *Close Encounters* and that's going to take all my time.” I said, “Yeah. It's a third of a picture book. How hard can that be?” and then, it's mostly captions. Then [Richard] Zanuck and [David] Brown, the producers,

got too busy and then Peter Benchley was kind of miffed that people said the movie was better than his novel, so nobody wanted to do it. But the studio wanted to have a book, so they said, “Well, can you do a whole book on the making of *Jaws*?” Since I'd been there through the whole process and I'd been there for post-production...I'd been absent for a few things but I could talk to the people who were there. All my witnesses were present. It was the same time period as when the movie came out. I said, “Yeah, I can write a book about it.” So around February of 1974 I got the assignment. I made a deal to write a book about the making of and I had a few books in mind. There was a wonderful book by Lillian Ross that was a *New Yorker* three-parter called *Picture*. Lillian Ross was kind of embedded with John Huston when he was filming the Civil War movie *The Red Badge of Courage*. She had done kind of a first-person narrative about how Huston made the movie. I had read a book by Moss Hart about breaking into Broadway. I said, “Yeah, I can write a book about the making of a movie.” I interviewed everybody who had information that I didn't have and I used my own knowledge of the picture business and everything that happened during the making of *Jaws*. I went away in March and April and May and shipped the manuscript in mid-May. In June, when the movie came out, the book was about a week or two behind, so the book hit the newsstands as the movie was out, and it enjoyed the same success as the movie. The book had like 23 or 24 printings. Millions of copies sold. And then it just kept selling over the years. Around 2000 I recaptured the copyright and republished it. We found another publisher and reissued it. It's been selling at a pretty steady clip ever since. It's the best selling book about the making of a movie, ever.

TD Were you really there most of the time during shooting, out on the boats and so forth, or was that all gleaned from interviewing others from the crew?

CG I was there during shooting. I didn't go out on the boat because, first of all, there wasn't a lot of room out there and there was no dialogue out there. My contributions were all structure and dialogue and, basically, the screenplay itself. What they shot for the last two months was after I was gone, after they finished shooting every bit of dialogue, including the scenes on the boat below deck. After they were through with that work, there was nothing left for me to do. My acting job was over. I went home and they stayed behind and went out to sea every day. In the meantime, I shared a house with Steven. We literally lived together. We would talk about the movie in the evening, talk about it before bed, talk about it in the morning over breakfast and talk about it in the car on the way to the set. Steven would be directing and, if I wasn't needed on the set as an actor, I would stay at home and write scenes that were going to be shot in a week or two to get them done before the cameras rolled. I was writing them, sometimes three days



or two days ahead of the schedule. There was some days when I would finish writing at 9 p.m. and the pages would be ripped from my hands, read by the producers, taken to the production offices where they'd be retyped as stencils and mimeographed so they could be distributed to the cast and crew at 6 in the morning for that day's shoot. It's not a way I would advise anyone to make a movie, but there are some good movies that have been made that way!

TD It has been reported that the original script of *Jaws 2* was supposedly much darker in tone. How much of that script remained in your draft and what are your ideas now when you imagine the perfect *Jaws 2* script without any restrictions?

CG Well, you know, that was one of those jobs where Zanuck and Brown offered me the opportunity to write the sequel in the first place. And they offered an insultingly low amount of money. So insulting I just said the hell with them! I told my agent to tell them to go piss up a rope. I remember saying to my agent, “They'll be back, and it's going to cost them.” So they went off and they developed the script. Then a director whose wife fancied herself a screenwriter, they hired that director to direct *Jaws 2* and his wife had strong ideas about what the script should be. It was going to be young people in jeopardy and it didn't work and the director was not professionally equipped to direct a big movie like that. It was very obvious about a week into shooting that he couldn't cut it. The studio made the difficult decision to replace the director and do a rewrite on the script. That's when they came to me and they said, “Can you attack these problems? The script is too dark. It's too...whatever it is.”

“So this climactic crashing of the shark into the tower is done at about the pace of the Goodyear Blimp approaching a stadium!”
Carl Gottlieb

We've already shot just the exteriors from Martha's Vineyard. Now we're going down to Florida to shoot all the water stuff. So you can't build any more sets and you've got to deal with the finale as it's been envisioned and storyboarded, but within those parameters can you think of something that works for the kids and gets them involved and blah blah blah..." I said, "I believe I can." I presented my ideas and they said, "Good, you're hired." Like the first time, I went off to start writing ahead of the schedule, just enough to keep pages flowing so the actors had something to do during the day while I was writing the next week's work. As to how I would do a perfect **Jaws 2** sequel, I've not thought about it because I was never given that opportunity. Nobody ever said, "How would you do a follow-up to this movie?" Also, you've got to remember that some of the characters are out. Dreyfuss was not going to do it. Shaw was not going to do it. Scheider had to do it because they had him under contract. He was very reluctant to do it, but they paid him a lot of money and they had him over a barrel. They could get an injunction that would keep him from doing other work if he turned down **Jaws 2**, so he reluctantly took the job. So he and I could laugh behind the backs of our producers. We made the movie as best we could. To its credit, it's a credible sequel and in its time it was one of the most successful sequels of all time until **Godfather 2**, to tell you the truth.

TD I guess the only one you really didn't have to worry about recasting was Lorraine Gary because she was married to a Universal executive. So she was probably pretty much of a shoo-in. Talk about the biggest case of nepotism ever!

CG Yep!

*TD It had to be a nightmare, or maybe it was a challenge, to work around 3D in **Jaws 3-D**.*

CG That was a challenge. Again, it was a decision that was made without me because Joe Alves, who had been the production designer on the first two and had directed a ton of second unit stuff on **Jaws 2**, he was ready to direct and he was the one that said, "**Jaws 3-D**, how about that?" The studio said, "Great! What a novelty! It'll make the third sequel fresh." What nobody appreciated was that it had been 20 years since the last 3D movie. The equipment wasn't around. The cameras had to be reinvented. The whole

process of shooting something in 3D had to be rediscovered. There weren't a whole lot of 3D artists and cameramen and technicians available. We had to learn on the job and we had a very, very stingy producer who was just an absolute tightwad. We made the film with a lot of restrictions. It works great in 3D except for the climactic confrontation where the shark bursts into the control tower for the undersea attraction.

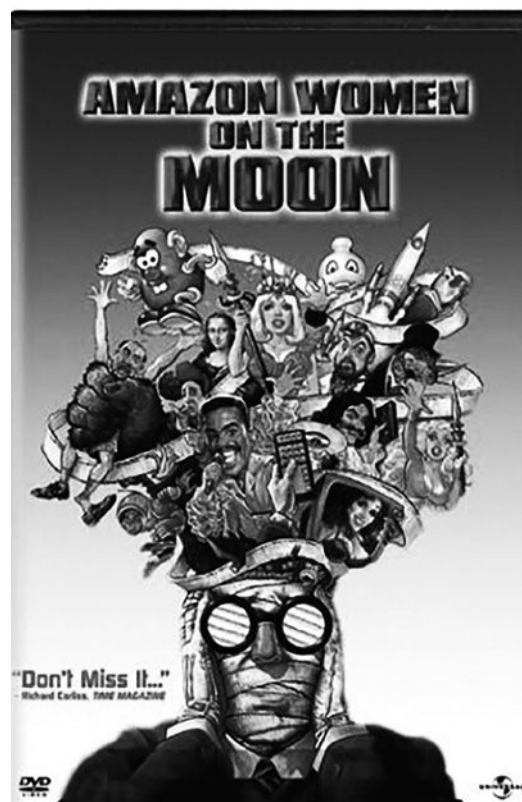
The shot was a very complicated 3D shot. It took days to set up and when Joe wanted to do a retake, he said, "Gee, the shark is moving awfully slow." And the producer would not spring for a second take. So this climactic crashing of the shark into the tower is done at about the pace of the Goodyear Blimp approaching a stadium! It kind of takes the suspense out of it!

*TD As the screenwriter of the original **Jaws**, what do you think about the new trend of **Sharknado** films?*

CG They were made for a buck and half. It was a ridiculous concept and it doesn't hurt the original. If anything, it reinforces the original as a classic because when you do something that's that big and becomes part of the popular culture, then everything that follows is kind of an homage. It wouldn't exist without the original. I like those guys. They kind of keep the genre alive.

*TD What about your ventures into directing? The first feature film you directed was **Caveman** in 1981. What was it like working with Ringo Starr?*

CG Ringo was great. He was very serious. He was very interested in being an actor. He understood movies. He was not a trained film actor, so he didn't have some of the skills that we expect in a movie actor. I remember I called Richard Lester. I had worked for Richard Lester in a movie called **Petulia**, which was shot up in San Francisco. I did a couple days work as just a day player, but I knew Richard Lester and he directed **A Hard Day's Night**. I said, "Look, I'm going to be working with Ringo Starr. What can you tell me about him?" He said, "Well, he hardly ever does the same thing twice." So whenever I shot a scene with Ringo, I would have two cameras—one on the master, on the whole scene, and one on Ringo for the close-ups because I couldn't count on him to repeat in take after take what he did in the master and have him do it in the close-up. A good film actor matches perfectly. Dennis Quaid, who is Ringo's costar in the movie, has an uncanny ability to remember exactly what his body, what his hands did, on every line in every shot. Dennis matches perfectly. You can't tell the difference between a close-up and a long shot because Dennis' hands are always in the right place at the right time. He's perfect. Ringo was kind of all over the place, but I had a second camera on Ringo, so if I needed a particular reaction, I got it. He was enthusiastic and a hard worker. It was a treat to work with him.



*TD We can't end this interview without mentioning **Amazon Women on the Moon**. Do you have any comments on the challenges of doing that segment **Son of the Invisible Man**?*

CG We had a good art director on that picture. There were several art directors because I think there were five different directors. In my unit, I had a really good art director and a terrific cameraman who understood black-and-white. He went back and looked at all those Universal films to duplicate the lighting and the sets and everything. As a director I had great support from the art department. Then I also had to study because I had to figure out camera angles where we would not show naked Ed Begley's genitalia on screen.

TD Did Ed do his own nude scenes?

CG Yes. He had a flesh-colored sock. He was a good sport about working almost entirely naked in front of fully dressed people. It was the same with the other one. I had another nude scene in that movie I directed, kind of a Playboy Bunny parody. **Playboy** and **Penthouse** used to feature their centerfolds in short, kind of R-rated nude soft-focus travelogues where the girls walked on the beach and read poetry. Our conceit was, in **Amazon Women**, that this Pet of the Year enjoys church work. The comic device was that she's never dressed. She does everything naked. So there's a great shot of her in church with just a little white hat and little white shoes and white gloves, naked! I had to direct her and there were some full frontal shots that were edited so that they wouldn't be, but she was very comfortable working naked-naked.



*TD Was there any reason why the segment **Peter Pan Theater** didn't end up in the film? I understand it was actually included in the DVD release.*

CG Yes. It's on the DVD release. It's a very funny section. I think it's a long piece and they were looking to keep the movie under 80 minutes or something like that. It's like a 10-minute hunk, or 9 minutes, but that was great fun. We shot that in a legit theater down in Long Beach, California. For your readers who have only seen it in theaters, there's a sequence called **Peter Pan Chekhov**, where they do a heavy Russian realist play but with all the actors flying.

*TD With this whole **Sharknado** craze, if Universal came back to you and said, "We're going to 're-fish,' if you will, **Jaws** again," would you want to be involved?*

CG You know, it's a good question. For about 30 years I would've said no because what's the point when you've done it perfectly the first time. Why take the chance of not getting it right the next time? Having done the two sequels, which were serviceable but didn't have the magic of the first, it would've been a little too crass and showbiz. It would've been strictly for the paycheck. If I had a strong enough idea to sustain another one, I might actually entertain the notion of doing another **Jaws**. I actually started writing one that wasn't shock-oriented called **Ghost Shark**. It was about the spirit of the departed shark. It was a low-budget horror film to be shot in Yugoslavia or someplace. The producers didn't have the money and they didn't pay me to write the script, so it never got written, but I actually gave it some thought. If somebody wants to do a full-scale sequel to the fish movie, we should talk. ☹

The Phantom's CAMP CORNER

WARNER ARCHIVE

(21.99 Blu-ray) 4/17

FROM HELL IT CAME (1957) B&W 81/2

D: Dan Milner. Tod Andrews, Tina Carver, Robert McNamara, Linda Watkins, Gregg Palmer, Baynes Barron, 71 mins.

Stop us if you've heard this before: a power-drunk Polynesian chieftain in Griffith Park condemns a young tribesman to death on trumped-up murder charges. After the victim is buried upright encased in a tree trunk, errant radioactivity recharges him, returning the fellow to life as a boogeyman-faced walking tree, dubbed Tabonga, with a dagger stuck in his stump. Panicked natives and boorish American scientists run around in confused circles in a bid to comprehend the situation. The money shots arrive late in the proceedings when Tabonga, sort of the Harvey Weinstein of the floral kingdom, grows interested in two catfighting native girls (in the market for a treesome?). He proceeds to press his trunk against one of them (do we detect a woody?) but soon becomes bored and so dumps the hapless lass in a convenient patch of quicksand. Next, Tabonga gets fresh with femme scientist Carver ("Is that a dagger in your trunk or are you just glad to see me?" she neglects to inquire), then tackles a male native (branching out?) before demonstrating that his bark was indeed worse than his bite, perishing in front of an impromptu firing squad headed by nominal hero Andrews. Despite the '50s radiation angle, this infamous mess of a movie plays more like a 1940s Monogram in serious need of Mantan Moreland (even lead Andrews acted, under the handle Michael Ames, in that Poverty Row studio's **Voodoo Man** and **Return of the Ape Man**). Corny "comic relief" is instead provided by a lady (Watkins) attempting an atrocious Cockney accent while throwing herself at all available male cast members. The Tabonga, concocted by busy B monster-maker Harry (Frankenstein's Daughter, Cat-Women of the Moon) Thomas channeling his inner Paul (The She Creature) Blaisdell, ranks as one of the most ridiculous creature designs in horror-film history, arguably trailing only **The Giant Claw's** made-in-Mexico bird monster. A bonus trailer, meantime, supplies a clue re how much the producers cared about their own production—there, the Tabonga is loudly identified as "BARANGA The Tree Monster!" Warner Archive's wide-screen black-and-white Blu-ray makes the film look better than it has any right to. If you're brave enough to witness the Tabonga in action, it's the only way to go. ☹

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THE TRUTH FROM THE BOOTH Confessions of a Film Projectionist

By Tim Ferrante

Last issue I alluded to my time as a projectionist for ABC-TV. I'd been hired to work in the 40-story corporate headquarters at 1330 Avenue of the Americas in Manhattan. The entire building was occupied by ABC for nearly 25 years before relocating in 1989. Along with two others, I was assigned there for nine years as a screening room engineer, which meant I ran 35mm and 16mm film as well as 3/4" U-Matic videocassette machines. We had three main screening rooms, two of which were small theatres and a third designed as a large and comfortable living room. We'd screen whatever was brought to us by whoever brought it. And one night I dodged a very big bullet.

You might recall a 1981 four-part mini-series entitled **Masada** which fictionalized the Roman siege of an Israeli mountaintop stronghold. It was a huge television event for the network. Our President of Entertainment, Brandon Stoddard, arranged a special VIP screening on 35mm film in our 36th floor screening room for New York City's elite reviewers and guests. Earlier in the day we'd received a lab-fresh print from the West Coast of **Masada's** opening episode, which ran roughly 100 minutes without commercials. My co-worker Tom and I noted that the reels were marked **Masada 1A**, **Masada 1B**, **Masada 2A** and **Masada 2B** as opposed to the typical Reel 1, 2, 3 and 4. It was odd, but we agreed that it meant the correct running order would be 1A, 2A, 1B, 2B.

Because this was such an important screening, our supervisor suggested both of us work the booth, which meant some decent overtime. Everyone was seated and Brandon gave an impassioned introduction and left the screening room. Tom said to me, "There's no need for two of us here. You go home." He was right that having two people wasn't necessary, so I happily took him up on his offer.

The following morning I walked into a buzz saw. Bottom line: The reel order that we decided was correct? *It wasn't*. The order should have been 1A, 1B, 2A, 2B. The screening was a disaster with no one picking up on the mixed reels until long after the mistake was made. Brandon was furious. The West Coast had already heard about the idiots in New York. And Tom got the blame along with the humiliation and explaining. That stupid Tom—I never would have made a mistake like that...*whew!* ☹

The Phantom's OLD DARK CHILLS!

COHEN MEDIA

(\$25.99 Blu-ray) 10/17

THE OLD DARK HOUSE (1932) B&W 8881/2

D: James Whale. Boris Karloff, Melvyn Douglas, Charles Laughton, Gloria Stuart, Raymond Massey, Lillian Bond, Ernest Thesiger. 72 mins.

Loosely based on the J.B. Priestley novel **Benighted** and laced with deadpan wit, Whale's post-**Frankenstein**, pre-**Bride** shock show spins on the even then hoary premise of a group of travelers being stranded at the mysterious title site during the course of a dark and stormy night. First to arrive are newlyweds Philip (Massey) and Margaret Waverton (Stuart, of future **Titanic** fame) and their caustic writer pal Penderel (Douglas), a card-carrying, quip-ready member of the post-World War I Lost Generation. They're soon joined by supremely vulgar self-made businessman Sir William Porterhouse (Laughton in a wonderfully flamboyant perf that, as befits his surname, is more steak than ham) and his companion Gladys (Bond), who promptly tumbles for Penderel. As for the old dark domicile's inhabitants, the Femm clan is spooky enough to make the Addams Family look like the Brady Bunch. The constantly quarrelling brother-and-sister act of atheist Horace (a splendidly shaky Thesiger) and religious zealot Rebecca (Eva Moore) are in turn dominated by their brutish, bearded, hard-imbibing butler Morgan (Karloff, again communicating via Monster-like grunts). Eerie surprises await our guests when they meet the family's 102-year-old progenitor Sir Roderick (Elspeth Dudgeon emoting under the gender alias John Dudgeon) and his craziest offspring Saul (Brember Wills), a pyromaniac who spends most of the movie locked away in an upstairs chamber. **The Old Dark House** exudes more black humor and musty melancholy than full-blown scares, but the film, especially in Cohen Media's deservedly heralded 4K Blu-ray restoration (which even received select theatrical engagements at retro venues like NYC's Quad Cinema), a radical upgrade over Kino's earlier DVD, easily succeeds in living up to its rep as a prime showcase for Whale's directorial and visual skills (dig those surreal funhouse mirror effects in Rebecca's bedroom). At the time, though, Universal honchos were more obsessed with pushing Karloff, who, fresh from his tortured turn in **Frankenstein**, not only scores top billing but is the subject of a fanciful pre-credits "Producer's Note" (present on Kino's release but absent on Cohen's). To wit: "Karloff, the mad butler

in this production, is the same Karloff who created the part of the mechanical monster in **Frankenstein**. We explain this to settle all disputes in advance, even though such disputes are a tribute to his great versatility." Bonus features on Cohen Media's disc include an archival interview with late auteur Curtis (**Night Tide**) Harrington who describes how, sparked by a late-life friendship with Whale, he rescued **The Old Dark House** from decay and oblivion, and a new talk with Boris' daughter Sara Karloff who discusses her actor dad's busy year of 1932, from his professional relationship with Whale to the many hours spent under the skilled hands of Universal makeup ace Jack Pierce. Also in the mix are a backdate audio commentary by Gloria Stuart and a fresh one with Whale biographer James Curtis, plus the 2017 re-release trailer.

OLIVE FILMS

(\$29.95 each Blu-ray) 10/17

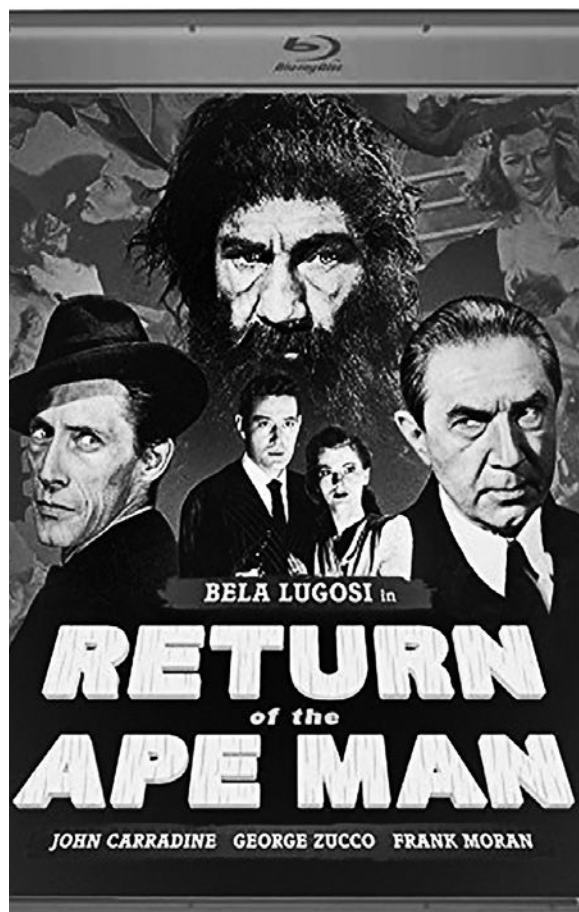
RETURN OF THE APE MAN

(1944) B&W 888

D: Phil Rosen. Bela Lugosi, John Carradine, "George Zucco," Frank Moran, Mary Currier, Michael Ames, Judith Gibson. 60 mins.

A classic study in Science Made Easy, this most elusive of Bela's fabled 1940s "Monogram 9" movies may also qualify as that notoriously erratic Poverty Row studio's most scatterbrained production (though 1942's **Black Dragons** gives it a run for its pennies). Typically obsessed, asocial mad scientist Professor Dexter (Bela), fresh from deep-freezing and defrosting a local bum (Ernie Adams), decides it's high time to broaden his horizons and hie to the frozen north, the better to dig in the ice until he happens upon a prehistoric ape man ripe for thawing and reviving. Nearly a year later (we're told), the not-so-good professor and the scientific poor soul, Prof. Gilmore (Carradine), he dragged along to share his folly, finally find their prize. Short story shorter: Prof. Dexter ultimately determines that his ape man (Moran) would fare better with part of a modern brain implanted in his skull and that constantly complaining crony Gilmore would be just the mind for the job. Sans head-shaving or complicated medical instruments, the transformation is rapidly completed and the resultant, understandably confused Gilmore/Ape Man heads for the streets to cause as much mayhem as the budget will allow (i.e., not very much). It seems safe at this point to say that Monogram honcho "Jungle Sam" Katzman was not thinking shelf life when he cranked out these quickies. For starters, third-billed George Zucco, slated to essay the title role, is not even in the movie (!), having walked out before filming commenced, gladly ceding the part to ex-boxer Moran (thus those looking for a Lugosi/Carradine/Zucco Voo-

doo Man reunion may be mightily disappointed). This ape man bears no connection to the studio's original **The Ape Man** (1943), wherein an unrelated madman of science (also Bela) self-devolves into semi-simian status and takes out his subsequent resentment on an actual man in an ape suit he keeps caged in the basement. Bela reflexively repeats those punishing riffs here, whipping his new ape man while barking out unreasonable demands. As has oft been cited, when the ape man attempts to escape, the camera clearly captures the 20th century shorts he's wearing under his prehistoric threads. The film frequently flashes back, meantime, to the posh domicile (earlier used in **Invisible Ghost** and other Monogram movies) where a party honoring Dexter's return is underway and a pre-op Gilmore regales the guests with a *long* rendition of "Moonlight Sonata." A theatrical prop room (Monogram's own?) provides a more inventive locale for the ape man, who tangles with a stage dummy (!) as well as an elderly security guard (Horace B. Carpenter, most fondly remembered as Dr. Meirschultz in Dwain Esper's immortal **Maniac** [VS #31]). To avoid venturing into spoiler territory, we'll leave the rest of **Return's** creative surprises for the eager viewer to discover. On the downside, **Return** doesn't benefit greatly from Olive's Blu-ray treatment, retaining the grainy grandeur of a very worn old print (not necessarily a bad thing but you may want to opt for the DVD instead). For more **Return** backstories, scope out Tom Weaver's essential tome **Poverty Row Horrors** (McFarland & Co.).



THE VAMPIRE'S GHOST (1945)B&W

888

D: Lesley Selander. John Abbott, Peggy Stewart, Charles Gordon, Grant Withers, Emmett Vogan, Adele Mara, Martin Wilkins. 59 mins.

You have to give credit to Republic Pictures for setting its sights on Val Lewton's low-key RKO classics (specifically *I Walked with a Zombie*) rather than Monogram's scatter-brained quickies for inspiration with *The Vampire's Ghost*, widely considered the best of that second-tier studio's handful of B horror flicks (see also *Valley of the Zombies*, *Catman of Paris*, et al). While director Selander and scripter Leigh Brackett (who'd adapt Raymond Chandler's novel for the Bogie/Bacall noir *The Big Sleep* the following year) fall well short of hitting Lewton and crew's heights, they provide atmosphere aplenty (cheap sets notwithstanding) and a different breed of monster in weary, existential 400-year-old vampire Webb Fallon (Abbott), a fiend who finds little joy in his own villainy. Currently operating a seedy club in the African port city of Bakunda, where he bilks drunken bilge rats and quaffs the blood of hapless natives, Fallon ultimately draws suspicion from missionary priest Father Gilchrist (Withers) when the local population continues to dwindle (causing a severe labor shortage for white bosses) and young friend Roy Hendrick (Gordon) is transformed into Fallon's very own Renfield. Like many a screen vampire, Fallon seeks to recruit a new eternal flame to brighten his lonely eternal existence, in this case Julie Vance (frequent B-western heroine Stewart), ultimately summoning her to his lair in a scene that copycats the above-cited *I Walked with a Zombie*. The film offers several interesting variations on ever-mutable screen vampire lore: Fallon can move about in daylight but only when wearing sunglasses; he can be momentarily halted by a brandished crucifix but not seriously destabilized; his fleshly reflection doesn't appear in mirrors but his clothes can be seen, *Invisible Man*-style. Abbott is quite effective as the wanly relentless bloodsucker (though it's impossible not to wonder what Bela might have done with the role—surely turned it into a different sort of picture), though Gordon is a bit stiff even before his conversion to vampire minion status, while club hostess Mara and dancer Arlyn Roberts supply a welcome dash of erotic exotica. Olive's Blu-ray reps a vast improvement over *Return of the Ape Man*'s presentation, offering a clear, vivid picture (with the unfortunate if unavoidable side effect of further exposing the cardboard production design) and crisp audio. No extras beyond optional English subtitles accompany Olive's Blu-rays, but the fact that the films are available at last furnishes reason enough for fans to rejoice. 8

The Phantom's THAT'S EDSPOITATION!

ORGY OF THE DEAD (1965)888

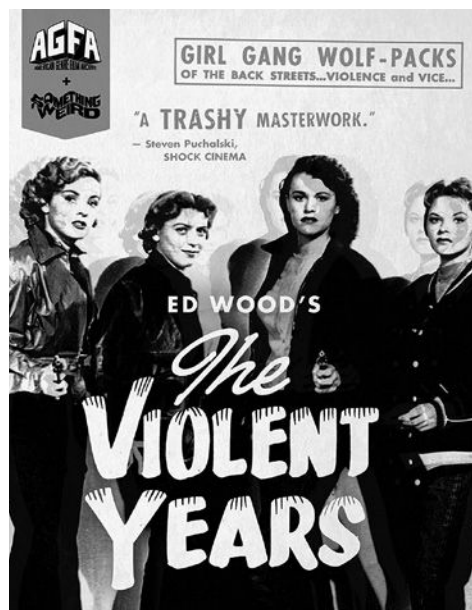
D: A.C. Stephen (Stephen Apostoloff). Criswell, Fawn Silver, Pat Barrington, William Bates. 90 mins. (Vinegar Syndrome, \$32.98 Blu-ray) 9/17

The Ed Wood shocker that dared to ask: "Are You Heterosexual?" at last makes its way to Blu-ray via the dedicated archivists at Vinegar Syndrome. With this R-rated extravaganza lensed in "Astravision and Sexicolor," scripter Ed locates the fine line between Eros and Thanatos and promptly trips over it. As our story opens, hapless writer Bob and squeeze Shirley (Wood-enly interpreted by co-producer Bates and actress Barrington, respectively, who would later reteam for 1970's *Agony of Love*) stumble upon a remote cemetery where TV prognosticator/Ed Wood superstar Criswell, as the Master of the Dead, presides over a seemingly eternal "dance of the dead"—i.e., several strip acts performed by an exotic succession of catatonic ecdysiasts. Classic Wood flourishes flower with abandon and abundance here: inspired dialogue (e.g., Bob to Shirley, "Your puritan upbringing may hold you back from my monsters, but it hasn't affected your art of kissing"); constant confusion 'twixt day and night; and static camerawork that harkens back to the celluloid Stone Age. Special kudos go to choreographer Marc Desmond, particularly for his inventive work on Texas Starr's "Cat Dance" (eat your heart out, David Winters). As for the performers, some, like Bunny ("Indian Dance") Glaser and Mickey ("Hawaiian Dance") Jines, are actually quite appealing, sporting shapely, toned terpsichorean forms, defying the top-heavy trend on view in most nudie-cuties of the day. Also on hand are Fawn Silver, delivering an oddly whiny Vampira impersonation as the "Mistress of the Dead," along with a Wolfman, Mummy, and Egyptian "giant." What ultimately saves this candy-colored burly-q of the macabre from drifting into lid-drooping territory, though, is a fun off-the-cuff audio commentary by filmmaker Frank (*Basket Case*, *Frankenhooker*) Henenlotter and Ed Wood biographer Rudolph (*Nightmare of Ecstasy*) Grey (even if Frank seems at times to be rushing the pic's conclusion). Vinegar Syndrome's disc also contains an interview with *Orgy* hoover Nadejda ("Slave Dance") Dobrev and an archival Q&A with *Astro-Zombies* auteur T.V. Mikels, who served as the film's assistant director, plus a still gallery. Withal, a stimulating night at the retro adults-only grindhouse, circa 1965.

THE VIOLENT YEARS (1956)B&W

8881/2

D: William Morgan. Jean Moorehead, Barbara Weeks, Arthur Millan, Timothy Farrell, Glenn Corbett, I. Stanford Jolley. 63 mins. (AGFA/ Something Weird Video, \$34.95 Blu-ray) 11/17



Ed wrote but didn't direct this bizarre tale about a quartet of crazy-for-kicks rich chicks who hold up gas stations, molest stray males (!), and generally ignore society's rules of accepted decorum. The gals, hired by a female fence (fronting for unseen Commie agents) to trash (or at least dishevel) a local high school, end up shooting it out with the fuzz, prompting one mortally wounded femme (Gloria Farr) to observe, "It ain't supposed to be...this way." The thrill-kill frills' philosophy is best summed up, however, by gang leader Paula Parkins' (Moorehead) oft-repeated rhetorical query: "So what?" Judge Jolley's windy climactic lecture, meanwhile, shows off Ed's writing talent as pointedly as anything in the acclaimed auteur's entire oeuvre. Giving the sometimes somnolent proceedings a figurative shot in the arm is the (too-brief) presence of the always-welcome, appropriately dead-voiced Timothy Farrell, the full-time California law enforcer/part-time thesp who enlivened such essential '50s exploitation fare as *Girl Gang*, *Gun Girls*, *Racket Girls* (aka *Pin-Down Girls*), *Dancehall Racket* and *The Devil's Sleep* (the last three as the same character, skid-row crime kingpin Umberto Scali), as a mildly concerned detective assigned to the case. Returning to comment on AGFA/ Something Weird's visually stunning new 4K Blu-ray restoration are Messrs. Henenlotter and Grey, who devote much time speculating re the mechanics of the gang's rape (or "MAN ATTACK" as a subsequent onscreen headline screams) of an unsuspecting victim, apparently resulting in Paula's pregnancy. The celebrity Edheads' expert testimony adds a consistently entertaining, if occasionally digressive, dimension to the experience. Other extras include a restored second feature, Boris (*The Unearthly*) Petroff's *Anatomy of a Psycho* (1961), featuring Ronnie (Adoptive Son of George) Burns, a "gutter-noir" trailer gallery from SWV, a memorabilia scrapbook, and more. Withal, a must addition to any self-respecting sleaze-vid library. 8

CULT-MOVIE MILESTONES: PEEPING TOM!

PEEPING TOM (1960) ♂♂♂♂

D: Michael Powell. Carl Boehm, Moira Shearer, Anna Massey, Brenda Bruce, Maxine Audley, Martin Miller. 101 mins. (Criterion Collection DVD)

The pre-*Psycho* world wasn't ready for a snuff-movie thriller, particularly one directed by a distinguished auteur like Michael Powell, whose previous work (with longtime writer/partner Emeric Pressburger, a team known as "the Archers") included such beloved classics as *The Red Shoes*, *The Tales of Hoffmann*, and *Stairway to Heaven* (aka *A Matter of Life and Death*). That *Peeping Tom* was not just a chiller but a prescient meditation on those voyeuristic impulses that make a film industry possible (even mandatory) in the first place was lost on most critics of the day. Ocular imagery dominates, from the opening shot of an arrow hitting its round target's center (the Archers' standard logo) to a hooker's eye seen in extreme close-up through photog Mark's (Boehm) lens, to his own three-eyed camera and cyclopean projector. Boehm is alternately timid and creepy as the camera-obsessed film technician, part-time pornographer, and full-time psycho determined to capture verite death on film, while Audley is strong as Vivian, the sightless, hard-drinking downstairs neighbor who's on to his madness. (Says she, "The blind always live in the rooms they live under.") Massey, as Audley's sensitive, appealing daughter Helen, is herself at work on a children's book about a magic camera; she and Mark form a mutual attraction. Though there's no gore in evidence, Mark's bladed tripod makes for a terrifying weapon and the murder sequences are intensely intimate. Powell shot the home-movie scenes—both Mark's and his sinister biologist father's (a silent cameo by Powell himself in a sly meta move)—in black-and-white. Black humor also abounds as Powell aims satirical thrusts at the hack, economy-minded side of the British film industry and entrusts the killer's investigation to three semi-comic detectives. ("I don't want to spoil anyone's fun," says one, "but we do have a maniac on our hands.") Powell, unjustly, had a celluloid scandal on *his*. Fortunately, through the efforts of cinephiles like Martin Scorsese, the critically slaughtered *Peeping Tom* at last reached its audience. Criterion's currently out-of-print DVD includes a TV documentary, *A Very British Psycho*, about screenwriter Leo Marks and the making of *Peeping Tom*, and an audio essay by Laura Mulvey. Needed next: a Criterion Blu-ray. ♂

Filmmakers in Focus! MICHAEL POWELL ON PEEPING TOM!

The following is excerpted from an address delivered by Michael Powell, on August 13, 1989, at the American Museum of the Moving Image in Astoria, New York. Martin Scorsese, who'd long cited *Peeping Tom* as one of his fave films, was instrumental in locating and restoring a mint 16mm print for screening at the AMMI's Powell fest. Powell—whose often ironic inflections, cadence and anecdotal powers are unfortunately diminished somewhat in the translation to print—died in 1990, at age 85.

MICHAEL POWELL: First of all, of course, comes the writer. Leo Marks was a remarkable little demon. His father had a very famous bookshop in Charing Cross Road—they made a film about it [*84 Charing Cross Road*]. Leo Marks had been watching me for some time, at various meetings and with other people. This morning he says to me, "Mr. Powell, how would you like to make a film about a young man who photographs the women he kills." I said, "Ooh, yes, that's me. That's a great idea. Let's go." He said, "Well, how do we go about it?" I said, "Well, you've probably got the idea in your head now. Why don't you come in twice a week, bring me what you've written, and we'll go over it and talk about it and evolve the script that way together. You'll write without me bothering you in the room. That should work."

And that's what we did. Evenings at nine o'clock he would turn up at my apartment, twice a week, smoking this new cigar and always very formal. And always with very good ideas. I said, "There's too much dialogue." He said, "Mr. Powell, you can't tell a story without dialogue." I said, "Oh, yes, I can. If you write these long dialogue scenes, you'll find they're on the cutting room floor." He said, "No doubt we can compromise."

So we completed the script and were rather pleased with it. I took it to Anglo-Amalgamated, a little firm run by two delightful fellows called Nat Cohn and Stuart Levy. Nat Cohn was very keen on it. And I said to him, "What do you think of Laurence Harvey for the young man in the story?" "Oh, that'd be great. Can you get him?" I said, "Well, yes, he's working next door at Shepperton and he's just finishing up a film; he's making *Room at the Top*, and I've told him about this and he wants to do it."

Then suddenly Laurence Harvey came into my stage from his stage. "They're crazy about my film. They've seen all the rushes in Hollywood. I've got an offer to play opposite Elizabeth Taylor in *Butterfield 8*. And what's more, they want to sign me up and I'll play with all the Hollywood leading ladies. Because they haven't had a new leading man to play with [or go to bed with]



for a long time." I said, "Well, can't you do it first, Larry—do the film first and then the rest of the program?" But he wouldn't. And I don't blame him. You've gotta grab a chance like that when it comes.

So then I had to find somebody. At a party I ran into Carl Boehm, who was a young Austrian, the son of Karl Boehm, the great conductor. And he wanted to be a conductor too, but of course his father didn't like that idea very much. And so he was thinking of turning actor. I had seen him in a film in Austria. So Nat Cohn said, "Is everything going all right?" "Everything's going splendidly. Oh, by the way, Laurence Harvey can't be in the film. I've got Carl Boehm instead." He says, "Who?" I said, "Carl Boehm." He wasn't pleased about that at all. I said, "Well, he's very good, very sensitive. I'm sure he can play the part." So we got over that hurdle for a bit.

The film was good because we all loved doing it. And we all understood what the other one wanted. And we all cared about what the other one wanted. And I can assure you that is very rare in the film business. That was a film that was made with love, by everybody. And yet, when it was shown to the critics, they hated it. They didn't just think it was unnecessary to make it; they just *loathed* it. And they couldn't say why. But they killed it. They killed it for twenty years.

"They didn't just think it was unnecessary to make it; they just *loathed* it."

Michael Powell

Carl and I, just two dreamers, we came to the premiere in London in dinner jackets, black tie, and saw it together, with everybody, the special-critics invitation people, and they all came out afterwards and passed by us and nobody spoke to us—just like in the movies! And the press came out saying, "What a terrible, disgusting, loathsome piece of shit. For God's sake, wash it down the toilet. Take it off." They used language like that. I was just—dazed. I had no idea the critics were so innocent. So I said to the distributor, Nat Cohn, "Look, let's do what somebody did years and years ago when they made a film of a Broadway play, **Mother Goddamn**." It all took place in a whorehouse, and that was a bit new then. I said, "Let's take space in all the papers and say this is what the critics said—this unbelievable abuse—come and judge for yourselves. Keep the film running. It'll do." But they wouldn't do it. They took it off that night; they yanked it. And it was booked already for all 'round the country. They probably made about fifty prints. They took it out of release, and Anglo-Amalgamated sold it to somebody for television and showed it in black and white here. It took me a long time later on, when I had the chance, with the help of Martin Scorsese; we discovered where the negative was and what sort of state it was in and saved it. ☿

HIGH MARKS

For related suspense, scope out Francis Searle's 1951 noir **Cloudburst** (MGM Limited Collection DVD), co-adapted by **Peeping Tom** scripter Leo Marks from his novel. Sort of an early, textured Brit **Death Wish**, the film stars Robert Preston as a Canadian espionage expert and former WW II resistance fighter who uses his commando skills when he embarks on a measured revenge mission following his wife's random murder. A moral inquiry as well as a thriller, **Cloudburst** boasts some surprisingly brutal touches for its time and place. Also available, via Olive Films, is a crisp new Blu-ray edition of **One of Our Aircraft Is Missing** (1942), The Archers' tense account of downed RAF fliers hiding from Nazis in Holland during the early days of WWII. Criterion Collection, meanwhile, has a special edition DVD of the late, great George Romero's professed fave film, The Archers' elegant fable **Tales of Hoffmann**; hopefully a Blu-ray will follow in the near future.

Rob Freese's SLASH-O-RAMA!

ARROW VIDEO

(\$32.98 2-disc Blu-ray + DVD) 8/17

THE SLAYER (1982) ☿☿☿

D: J.S. Cardone. Sarah Kendall, Frederick J. Flynn, Carol Kottenbrook, Alan McRae, Michael Holmes, Carl Kraines. 90 mins.

Kay (Kendall) is an artist going through a surreal phase in her career as her warped dreams begin inspiring her artwork. With her husband Eric (Flynn), she joins her brother David (McRae) and his wife Brooke (Kottenbrook) for a week-long, off-season getaway on a fishing island. They are pretty much the only inhabitants, but Kay begins to feel the presence of something evil, something from her dreams. Convinced her dreams can come to life and kill them if she sleeps, she awakens to see Eric's severed head next to her in bed, then others begin to go missing until Kay is alone to face her nightmare monster. Cardone's directorial debut is a solid chiller that some claim may have inspired Wes Craven's similarly themed **A Nightmare on Elm Street**. It didn't, but it was a nice change of pace from all the teen slashers of the era. It follows the slasher formula but focuses the terror on young adults, and the dream stalker is a welcome switch from the overabundance of heavy-breathing psychos filling cinema screens of the time. The film never got much of a shake in theaters and later appeared on a big box double feature VHS cassette with Fred Olen Ray's **Scalps** from Continental Video, and it was this cut version that most fans first saw. (This very same VHS, in good condition, currently fetches some decent prices on eBay.) Since that videotape went out of print, **The Slayer** has not been widely seen. It did manage to land on the U.K.'s list of Video Nasties, and various VHS and DVD editions came out over the years, but the film remained relatively rare and hard to come by in the States. Arrow Video rectifies that with this beautifully realized Blu-ray/DVD combo presenting the film uncut for the first time. Extras include multiple commentaries, interviews, a tour of where the film was shot on Tybee Island, Georgia, still gallery and theatrical trailer. Kendall does a great job as the mostly hysterical Kay, while Robert Short's effects are inventive and squirm-inducing. (Watch for the severed head's bloody teardrops.) The ending is a little clunky but doesn't ruin the film's overall effect. This is a fun slasher shocker from the early '80s that deserves fright fans' attention. ☿

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See page 54 for details.



David Annandale's THRILLER THEATER!

THE STRANGER (1946) B&W ☿☿☿

D: Orson Welles. Edward G. Robinson, Loretta Young, Orson Welles, Philip Merivale, Richard Long, Konstantin Shayne. 95 mins. (\$29.95 Blu-ray Olive Films) 8/17

UN War Crimes investigator Wilson (Robinson) lets convicted Nazi Meinike (Shayne) escape, hoping this smaller fish will lead him to the big fish: Franz Kindler (Welles), architect of the Holocaust. Wilson trails Meinike to the small town of Harper, Connecticut, where Kindler has taken on the identity of Charles Rankin, history teacher, about to marry the naïve Mary Longstreet (Young). Wilson loses Meinike, and Kindler kills his former underling, so though Wilson has his suspicions, he cannot prove that Rankin is Kindler. To do that, he will need Mary's help, and she will have to confront shattering truths about her marriage. Though rarely mentioned in the same breath as **Citizen Kane** or **Touch of Evil**, **The Stranger** is nonetheless a gripping thriller. The expressionist shadows of the prologue give way to deceptively sun-dappled Harper, only to return with a vengeance for the climax, and the steel resolve that Young's Mary shows in that climax is a deeply satisfying transformation of her character. Welles is by turns suave, paranoid and terrifying, while Robinson effortlessly conjures an aura of low-key relentlessness. Striking, too, is the town of Harper, whose inhabitants appear to inhabit a bubble that has shielded them from the War and from the need to think about the wider world at all. In its portrayal of just how easily Kindler/Rankin inserts himself into the town's life, his secrets kept by the genuinely ignorant and by the willfully so, the film feels arguably even more chillingly relevant than it was in 1946. This is tense, smart filmmaking and well worth rediscovering, especially in the form of the lovely new transfer on Olive's Blu-ray. Extras include an audio commentary by Nora Fiore and a booklet essay by Dr. Jennifer Lynde Barker. ☿

EURO CHILLS: NASCHY HABITS!

By Rob Freese

INQUISITION (1976) ♂♂♂

D: Paul Naschy. Paul Naschy, Daniela Giordano, Monica Randall, Ricardo Merino, Tony Isbert, Antonio Iranzo. 90 mins. (\$24.95 Mondo Macabro) 6/17

Three witch-hunters led by Bernard de Fossey (Naschy) appear in a quiet village to rid the citizens of their witch population. Which is to say, anyone who has a beef with someone else could accuse them of being a witch and Boneheaded Bernard would figure out some insane torture to prove that person was indeed a witch and then sentence them to death, all in the name of the Lord. De Fossey falls for the fetching Catherine (Giordano), daughter of the local magistrate, who is planning on being married until her young suitor is brutally murdered by a band of thieves. Grief-stricken, Catherine sells her soul to the Devil (also played by Naschy) in exchange for discovering the identity of the man responsible for her fiancé's death. (And who this happens to be should be no real surprise to anyone.) This is a unique entry in the '70s' grotesque subgenre of "witchfinder/torture" flicks in that there really *is* a practicing witch living out in the woods and it is through her that Catherine learns how to hook up with Old Scratch. In his directorial debut, Naschy delivers a tight thriller and even, somehow, makes his despicable character kind of sympathetic. While most sources cite this as a 1978 production (which was when it was released theatrically in Spain), it carries a 1976 copyright. (*Inquisition* received no Stateside theatrical release from what I can find, turning up only in a throwaway VHS version in 1984.) Extras include Spanish/English audio options, introduction by Naschy (ported over from a previous DVD release), interview with Giordano, commentary, **Blood and Sand**, a documentary on Spanish horror, and a 12-page booklet. Mondo Macabro issued a special numbered version limited to 666 copies that sold out within days. Right now is a great time to be a Naschy fan, as Scream Factory put out **The Paul Naschy Collection Volume 1** this past summer, while winter witnesses the release of **The Paul Naschy Collection Volume 2**, which includes a couple of new-to-disc titles, **The Werewolf and the Yeti** and **A Dragonfly for Each Corpse**, while Code Red has also announced a number of Naschy HD debuts. NYC area cinephiles, meanwhile, were treated to a rare 3D screening of star Naschy's **Frankenstein's Bloody Terror**, hosted by American distributor Sam Sherman, at the Quad Cinema this October past.

The Phantom's DUTCH TREATS: DICK MAAS DOUBLE FEATURE!

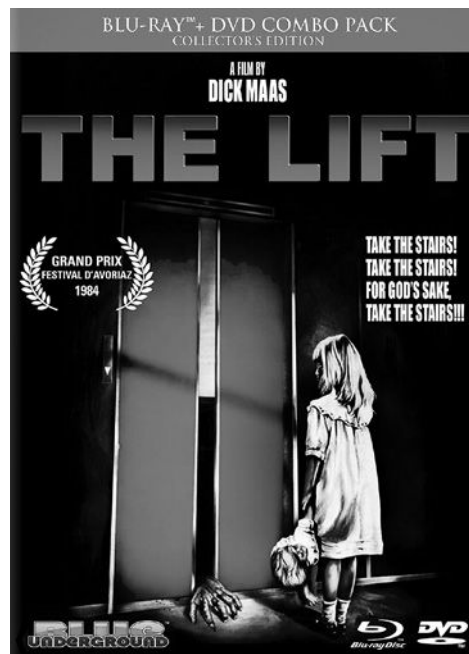
BLUE UNDERGROUND

(\$39.98 2-disc Blu-ray set each) 11/17

THE LIFT (1983) ♂♂♂1/2

D: Dick Maas. Huub Stapel, Willeke van Amatooy, Josine van Dalsum, Hans Dagelet, Johan Hobo, Dick Scheffer. 98 mins.

Dutch auteur Maas' feature-film debut plays like a vintage Larry Cohen movie (and we mean that in the best sense), utilizing many of the same elements that distinguish the latter's best genre efforts—a seemingly neutral, even benign entity gone lethally haywire, a maverick hero determined to investigate, aided by an unlikely ally, bureaucratic bungling and official interference, all sprinkled with sick jokes, wrapped in dark irony (Maas especially excels in clever shock cuts—'scope out the ambulance segue) and capped off by a sinister conspiracy. Here, the perp is an elevator in a swanky hotel that suddenly seems to cop a hostile attitude towards its riders. Two horny visiting salesmen and their zoftig dates supply the titular conveyance with its first victims when they find themselves trapped in a rapidly overheating cage stuck between two high floors. A hapless blind man and a curious security guard who literally loses his head are the next to be sacrificed to the malfunctioning machine, prompting hotel honchos to dispatch cool, laconic technician Felix (Stapel) to solve the deadly problem. When failure and cover-ups ensue, newspaper journalist Mieke (van Amatooy) presses our protag for info; eventually, the two join forces (a platonic merger that nonetheless radically destabilizes Felix's spouse Saskia [van Dalsum]) in a search that takes them to a possibly paranoiac computer expert who relates tales of renegade microchips—not unlike the kind operating the rogue elevators—with destructive minds of their own. Although working with limited resources, director/writer Maas succeeds in creating an at-once witty, atmospheric and suspenseful affair, further enhanced by a haunting score (also composed by the busy Maas), that rises nearly to the top genre-film floor. We originally caught **The Lift** via long-defunct Media Home Entertainment's pan-and-scan VHS, which resembled but a faint, fuzzy-shadow of Blue Underground's eye-popping Blu-ray, one that brightly accentuates the sheen of the luxury hotel's glossy color schemes. The label's double-disc set arrives with a wealth of extras, including an audio commentary by Maas and editor Hans van Dongen, a revealing interview with amiable star Stapel, **Long Distance**, a 2003 short film by Maas, Dutch & U.S. trailers, poster & still gallery, and collectible booklet. Withal, **The Lift** reps a rewarding ride.



DOWN (2000) ♂♂♂

D: Dick Maas. James Marshall, Naomi Watts, Eric Thal, Michael Ironside, Edward Herrmann, Ron Perlman, Dan Hedaya. 111 mins.

Maas' **Down** (aka **The Shaft**) is a bigger (a reported \$15 mil budget), busier, broader, louder, coarser—in short, Americanized—remake of his comparatively subtle Dutch shocker **The Lift**. The basic plot hews fairly close to the original: When a malfunctioning express elevator in NYC's 102-story Millennium Building scares the wits (and, in one case, the infant) out of a car full of pregnant women (an inventively revolting scene, followed by a shock cut to frying burgers), **Tremors**-like repairmen pals Mark (Marshall) and Jeff (Thal) (replacing **The Lift**'s lone hero) rush to the scene. Unfortunately for the local citizenry, the pair's best efforts go for naught as the crazed contraption continues to claim fresh human prey. Determined tabloid reporter Jennifer (Watts) winds up joining Mark after Jeff falls victim to the lethal lift. Their investigation ultimately leads to the possible involvement of mad scientist Steinberg (Ironside), disgraced architect of an earlier experiment involving computer chips enriched with living dolphin brains (!). While **Down** demonstrates that bigger, busier, broader, louder and coarser is not necessarily better, it delivers its own brand of frequently CGI-enhanced thrills; for all its strenuous flash, the film failed to nail a U.S. theatrical release, presumably due to its ill-timed appearance shortly before the 9/11 terrorist attacks, along with specific references to Bin Laden and the 1993 World Trade Center sabotage. Aerosmith's "Love in an Elevator," meanwhile, makes for an apt exit tune. Blue Underground's Blu-ray/DVD Combo Pack edition includes an audio commentary by Maas and stunt coordinator Willem de Boukelaer, a making-of featurette, behind-the-scenes footage, poster & still gallery, and a collectible booklet. ♂

BEST OF THE FESTS: FILMQUEST 2017

By Joseph Perry

FilmQuest founder and director Jonathan Martin puts the emphasis on fun for filmgoers and guests alike. He and his staff have seen their fest named one of *MovieMaker Magazine's* 50 Film Festivals Worth the Entry Fee in 2015 and 2017, and this year's edition, which ran from September 8–16 in Provo, Utah, offered a varied genre slate. Most selections were not the usual suspects making the fest rounds; several still had no online information about them. Nevertheless, these films were of the highest caliber, so kudos to Martin and programmers for taking chances on many obscure premieres.

The English-language French chiller **Hostile** won FilmQuest's Cthulhu Trophies for Best Foreign Film and Best Makeup. Writer/director Mathieu Turi's debut rates among the best creature features we've seen in recent memory, thanks to its dramatic weight, absorbing performances, and sure-handed direction. Brittany Ashworth stars as Juliette, a young woman on a deadly mission in a post-apocalyptic world. When her vehicle overturns and her fellow group members leave her to fend for herself, she must battle a terrifying humanoid monster—essayed by renowned creature actor Javier Botet—along with ghosts from her past. Via flashbacks, Turi tells of Juliette's journey from desperate drug addict to the object of wealthy art gallery owner Jack's (Grégory Fitoussi) affection, while gradually revealing how the "normal" world became a wasteland, serving up a tantalizing work that offers poignant moments along with nail-biting scares.

My favorite 2017 FQ entry was the French-language Canadian film **Dead Leaves** (aka **Feuilles Mortes**). Another post-apocalyptic drama, **Dead Leaves** boasts a strong western-movie flavor, shaping up as a mesmerizing, heart-wrenching experience powered by an incredible ensemble cast. Created by Thierry Bouffard, Carnior, and Edouard Tremblay, the film unfolds in Canadian forests during autumn. Rugged, middle-aged Bob (Roy Dupuis, of **Screamers** fame) prefers to wander this wasteland alone, but circumstances bring him into contact with kind and villainous people alike, including Josee (Audrey Rancourt-Lessard, Cthulhu Trophy winner for Best Supporting Actress, Feature), a young woman who wants to be his partner. The chemistry between these two constitutes one of the film's many high points. Other story arcs include a rape revenge thread and violent conflict between a tightly knit group of survivors and a band of murderous criminals. Characters and stories overlap, and the jarring third act is unforgettable in its balance

of bleakness and optimism. The trio behind this outstanding effort has fashioned a handsome film that forgoes the usually showy special-effects trappings, focusing instead on human drama.

The Spanish horror thriller **The Glass Coffin** (aka **Le Ataud de Cristal**) (MVD Visual) captured the Cthulhu Trophies for Best Feature Film and Best Actress, Feature, for Paola Bontempi's riveting turn as Amanda. Amanda is a renowned actor on her way to a ceremony to receive a lifetime achievement award when a terrifying electronically distorted voice tells her all she needs to do is follow its instructions and she'll be fine. Naturally, what the voice's owner has in mind is increasingly disturbing and dangerous. Director Haritz Zubillaga, who co-wrote with Aitor Enirez, delivers a taut, sharp-looking shocker set mostly inside a limousine. Zubillaga uses tight shots and vivid color changes to make his setting feel claustrophobic and dizzying. Bontempi is in what seems like nearly every frame. Despite her intense performance, I was ultimately put off by the film's **Saw**-like torture and humiliation approach, one that reaches its nadir in a rape scene included for sheer shock value.

Speaking of shock value, the Norwegian effort **Vidar the Vampire** (aka **Vampyr Vidar**) descended to even lower depths. Co-director and co-writer Thomas Aske Berg (with Fredrik Walde-land) stars as Vidar Harr, a thirtysomething farmer who lives an isolated existence with his overbearing, staunchly Christian mother. When he seeks change from a higher power, he is reborn as the titular bloodsucker. This dark comedy tackles religion (Brikt Skrettingland portrays Jesus Christ as a hard-partying libertine), psychology, and other social topics with a broad approach. The humor missed its mark with me, though Berg won the Cthulhu Trophy for Best Actor, Feature.

Diego Hallivis copped the Cthulhu Trophy for Best Director, Feature, for his time-travel tale **Curvature**. This dramatic sci-fi film relates the story of Helen Phillips (an impressive Lyndsy Fonseca), an engineer whose physicist husband Wells (Noah Bean) recently committed suicide. Before his untimely demise, he had been working on a time machine with Thomas (Glenn Morshower), with whom he'd co-founded Curvature Research. Thomas asks Helen for her permission to continue with the experiment, which she grants. Soon after, Helen awakes one morning in a confused state and receives a phone call from a mysterious woman telling her she needs to leave the house before a certain man outside spots her. Hallivis does an admirable job helming the intermittent action set pieces, including a car chase. Writer Brian (**Some Kind of Hate**) De Leeuw goes the cliché route too often, though, culminating in a reveal most viewers will guess early on. Fonseca's Helen spends most of her time in a daze, which doesn't allow the actress much room to stretch. Hallivis deserves credit for lending the film a stylish look and for keeping the movie entertaining despite the script's shortcomings.



FilmQuest had some absorbing documentaries on tap, including Cthulhu Trophy for Best Documentary winner **Cassette: A Documentary Mixtape**, a fun look at a technology that has found new life among young retro-culture aficionados and those who've never considered it obsolete. Co-directors/co-writers Zachary Taylor and Georg Petzold capture the passion of cassette lovers, from established rock stars like Henry Rollins and Sonic Youth's Thurston Moore, to old-school NYC rap and hip-hop DJs and followers, to current musical acts who find their material sells better on cassette than CD or digital downloads, to cultural historians who focus on found recordings. Interestingly, Lou Ottens, the man credited with inventing the cassette tape (though he humbly states that he was merely part of a team at Philips that created the technology), doesn't share that nostalgia and can't understand the fascination with a technology that is long past its heyday. The filmmakers employ a mixtape style, bouncing back and forth between subjects, with mixed results.

Brad Abrahams' documentary **Love and Saucers** focuses on 72-year-old David Huggins, an outsider artist who obsessively paints pictures about the contact with extraterrestrials he's allegedly had since childhood. Huggins' story goes a bit further than the usual contactee case, though; he claims he lost his virginity to an alien woman at 17 and that he has fathered several alien-human hybrids with her. Abrahams adopts an observational approach, allowing Huggins to relate his stories without judgment. The director also interviews several people in Huggins' social orbit, including neighbors, his boss at a deli, other alleged contactees, and his son. **Love and Saucers** is a thought-provoking documentary about a captivating subject. If this year's offerings are any indication, the next FilmQuest should be an equally exciting affair. ☿

MINNESOTA MINI-MOGUL CHRISTOPHER R. MIHM: DEMON WITH THE ATOMIC BRAIN!

By Jeff Strate

DEMON WITH THE ATOMIC BRAIN (2017) B&W 88

D: Christopher R. Mihm. Amanda R. Tietz, Jeremy Frandrup, Tyler Haines, Christian Finch, Mark Haider, James Norgard. 76 mins. (Saint Euphoria Pictures)

"It looks like nothing I've ever encountered on our planet. And yet, we are on Earth. Perhaps we are in an alternate reality which evolved in a different way than our own. Until I have more data, I cannot be certain."

Dr. Denning

Demon with the Atomic Brain

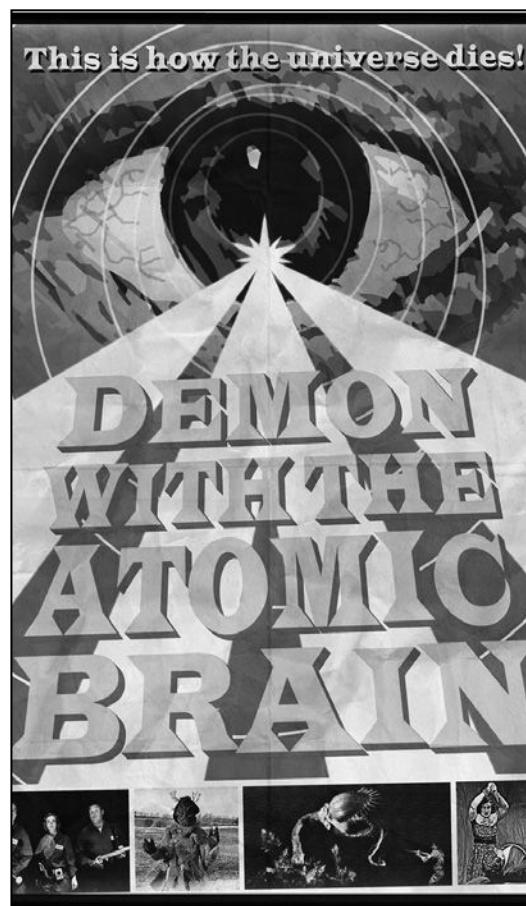
The recently released DVD **Demon with the Atomic Brain**, featuring both English and Esperanto (!) soundtracks, is an alternate reality black-and-white sci-fi adventure that follows a patrol of six 1950s military and science specialists. Their mission: to leap through a series of cheesy, shimmering portals to find and unplug a powerful computer linked to a machine that is generating even cheesier time-space alternate realities before destroying the entire universe. **Demon** is the 12th of producer/director Christopher R. Mihm's homages to low-budget '50s drive-in movies. Beginning with his 2006 debut, **The Monster of Phantom Lake**, Mihm has filmed mostly out of his suburban Minneapolis home. **Attack of the Moon Monsters** and his other titles, which regularly involve family and friends, have earned a few regional and national kudos along with a growing fan base.

The parody is a smartly crafted exercise in whimsy with spot-on art direction, costuming and prop-mastering that serves Mr. Mihm's intent with cheap, laminate-paneled offices, papier maché caves, black box sets and a few major sequences filmed outdoors with hovering Frisbee-starfish-like face-eaters (we see the random puppet thread), terrestrial jellyfish, shrubby tree creatures and a giant stop-motion monster plant, with plastic ray guns salvaged from a Toys 'R' Us trash bin and scientific devices cobbled together from Betty Crocker's kitchen. Also on view is a gratuitous and much-too-long wrestling scrape featuring clumsy cavewomen lorded over by a lowball version of Harvey Weinstein. Stars Tietz and Frandrup, featured players, and director Mihm figuratively tapdance on a tightrope balanced between hokey hi-jinks and genre affection. The dialogue could have been ripped from a mimeograph machine spinning out copies of a script for a

summer camp sketch begging for a lot of overacting. The enthusiastic cast has the glow of a community theater company thrilled to be in a movie, even one mostly lensed in a studio crammed into a suburban Minnesota basement.

Here's the story arc, I think: Dr. Adams (Tietz), a brilliant computer designer, is recruited to help a special ops mission locate a machine that can open a wormhole portal for instantaneous travel to different points in space/time. The machine is lost somewhere on the other side of one of those wormholes and is controlled by the powerful DMN Mark 6 computer, which Adams helped create. But to keep the wormhole machine and the DMN Mark 6 humming during a power outage, someone had experimentally hooked them up to an atomic reactor. As energy levels increased, alternate time/space bubbles began to fracture and multiply...I think. Lab-coated Dr. Gabriel (Norgard) explains the threat more clearly (I think) during the team's pre-mission briefing: "As of right now, energy levels within the disturbance are steadily rising. We've determined that within the next 72 hours they'll reach a critical mass and cause another explosion which will force the disturbance to expand exponentially and engulf literally everything. If we can't shut it down in that time frame, goodbye universe as we know it. I don't mean to be dramatic, but you're the last hope any of us has to survive." Gabriel pauses, smiles and says, "No pressure."

Like Diana in last summer's blockbuster **Wonder Woman**, Dr. Adams is constantly deflecting the dumb-butt assumptions that dumb-butt guys in the 1950s used to debunk thoughts of women joining men in combat or, in this case, time/space warps. World War I-era Diana was trained by elite Amazonian fighters, wore bracelets of sub-mission and holstered a Lasso of Truth. Dr. Adams is armed only with a Ph.D. and a hand-held "doohicky" that can lock on to the DMN Mark 6 signal. But with the contrarian confidence of a Mensa member, Adams rises above the sexist doubts and wisecracks of cigar-chomping General Castle (Haider) and specialist Agar (Haines), two of the men with whom she has been teamed. Tietz scores for gender equality without needing the \$150 million budget or the beautiful Chris Pine that Gal Gadot got. Frandrup is the thesp who services **Demon** the way Pine services **Wonder Woman**, but without the latter's tragic, puppy-love current. Frandrup projects the required lack of emotional depth demanded by the genre's one-take directors and no-nonsense combat heroes. His Sergeant Carlson is all mission; his buff face, body language, voice and acting licks are one of **Demon**'s few bows to the big time. When Carlson barks *fire-at-will* orders, or fights off a panic attack in a claustrophobic alternate-reality bubble, we believe him as a character in a 1950s sci-fi flick.



But the equality theme is embedded in the real business of **Demon**'s 76-minute journey: lots of fun, highlighted by the minimalist ways a small basement studio with two corners and one door to the laundry room can be dressed for a sci-fi actioner—scenes set in featureless black or white spaces and an office with alternate time/space cues like the wall photo of President Dwight Eisenhower that is switched for "President" Adlai Stevenson. Evocative genre music and sound effects tracks from first frame to fadeout underscore some unexpectedly stunning photography and blaster effects, both in-studio, on a wintry field and in a luminescent stand of jack pine. Throughout, the edits are scalpel-edged from master shots to close-ups and reaction shots to scripted groaners. Early on, eerie howls in the black void the team has leapt into prompt an inspired sequence of takes when the specialists fearfully look and brace this way and that as the unseen horror circles in. It could be Godzilla full-throating after inhaling balloon helium, but no—it's a giant Venus flytrap with a craving for protein. Filmmaker Mihm clearly invests more time and art-smarts into his craft than many of those who have inspired his work. 8

Jeff Strate is a seasoned TV producer/writer whose credits include 1978's **Attack of the Burger Pods**, 2008's **Godzilla Attacks Eden Prairie**, and a 1986 **PM Magazine** Phantom Agent story in New York with the Phantom of the Movies.

BEST OF THE FESTS: WREAK HAVOC HORROR FILM FESTIVAL By Joseph Perry

The Wreak Havoc Horror Film Festival celebrated its third year with its engagement at the Crown at the Carolina Theater in Greensboro, North Carolina, September 22-23, 2017. Festival Director Dan Sellers and Assistant Festival Director Sammie Cassell assembled an engrossing batch of independent feature-length and short films that fright-fare aficionados should put on their radar.

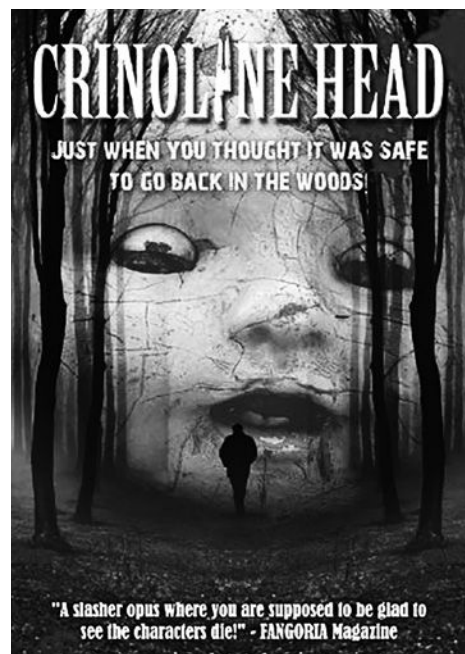
South Carolina-based filmmaker Tommy Faircloth (**Dorchester's Revenge: The Return of Crinoline Head** [2014]; **Generation Ax** [2001]) combines gruesome slasher elements and a supernatural mystery with his latest feature film, **Family Possessions**. Leah Wiseman stars as Rachel Dunn, a teen whose dreams of moving away from the family and starting university are put on indefinite hold when her financially strapped parents (indie genre stalwart Jason Vail and Morgan Monnig, both recent Faircloth regulars) agree to the terms of inheritance re the home of Rachel's recently deceased grandmother. Rachel corresponded regularly with the woman, whose will insists that Rachel live in the house; otherwise, it will be sold, with the money donated to charity. Rachel is unhappy with the situation but quickly befriends neighbor Maggie (Erika Edward), who shares local gossip that residents in the Dunn family's new hometown believe that Grandmother Dunn was involved with the occult. Rachel and her brother Andy (Andrew Wicklum) see and hear strange occurrences in the house, and soon several gory deaths take place. Faircloth goes for an old-fashioned style of shocker here, using practical effects, and the result is a fun movie with some nail-biting scenes. Those effects were crafted by Tony Rosen—doll manufacturer of *Annabelle* in both **The Conjuring** (2013) and its spin-off **Annabelle** (2014)—and have a gory modern feel that simultaneously recall a 1970s vintage flavor. Although a few standard haunted house tropes surface, the writer/director—who also served as cinematographer and editor—offers plenty of originality and helms the proceedings with a confident hand. Wiseman shines as Rachel, a self-assured young woman determined to uncover the secrets of her new home and her grandmother's puzzling past. Horror-movie veterans Felissa Rose (**Sleepaway Camp**) and Mark Patton (**Nightmare on Elm Street 2: Freddy's Revenge**) are on hand as Maggie's foul-mouthed, alcoholic mother and a malignant barista, respectively. **Family Possessions** has been garnering numerous nomina-

tions and winning many awards on the festival circuit, including noms for Best Feature and Best Actress (for Wiseman) at Wreak Havoc.

Dry Blood tells the tale of Brian Barnes (Clint Carney, who wrote the screenplay), multiple-substance abuser who repairs to a remote cabin that he co-owns to try, once again, to go cold turkey. His friend Anna (Jaymie Valentine) comes to ease him through the process, but the going isn't easy as Brian begins seeing increasingly disturbing and grisly visions, including a headless little girl. Not helping matters any is intrusive local cop (director Kelton Jones) who makes it alarmingly clear that he doesn't want Brian in his jurisdiction. The film plays freely with whether Brian's visions are hallucinations or supernatural entities, and the filmmakers offer some clever twists. Carney won the festival's Best Actor award; his portrayal of the nervous, ever-gesticulating Barnes feels authentic to his character, who is undergoing physical and mental torture. Jones is also solid as the flatfoot, reminiscent of the type of rural lawmen who inhabit Jim Thompson novels. **Dry Blood**, winner of Wreak Havoc's Best Feature Film award, is a tense psychological horror furnishing plenty of well-realized gore effects and nightmarish images to go along with its mystery and suspense.


Wreak Havoc excelled in its selection of short films. Jonathan Martin's **Creatures of Whitechapel** is a thrilling, twisted U.K./U.S. co-production rich in gothic horror legends and steampunk-style practical effects. Fans of Hammer Films should rate this short as a must-see effort. While Victorian London is terrified by a string of killings thought to be the handiwork of Jack the Ripper, Victor Frankenstein (Barrett Ogden)—aided by female assistant Igor (Carlee Baker)—seeks the elusive element needed to bring his female creation (Victoria Halloran) to life. Doctor Pretorius (Rick Macy) also has a keen interest in what is happening. **Creatures of Whitechapel** quite deservedly won Wreak Havoc's Best Special Effects award—the laboratory alone made that a lock!

The Australian short chiller **Alfred J Hemlock** captured two Wreak Havoc awards, for Best Short Film and for Renaye Loryman's Best Actress turn as a sad, desperate young woman facing her mortality. Director Edward Lyons balances his darkly humorous short with menacing dread and whimsical charm. Callous boyfriend Guy (Christian Charisiou) leaves Emily (Loryman) to fend for herself in a dark alley. Soon the mysterious Alfred J Hemlock (a terrific Tristan McKinnon as a sinister, otherworldly being) offers her a permanent break from her world-weariness. Director Lyons' keen sense of visual flair gives the film a magical feeling despite the fact that it primarily takes place in an alley. With gorgeous cinematography, first-rate makeup work, and stunning visual effects, Edward Lyons and crew have crafted a short that cries out to be realized as a feature-length effort.



Another superior short film is Shant Hamassian's **Night of the Slasher**, which will thrill fans of 1980s masked slasher icons and horror comedies alike. Jenelle (Lily Berlina) dances around her living room in her underwear, revealing a wicked scar on her throat. She invites a nerdy high-school classmate (Scott Javore) over, and viewers soon see that she has a "horror movie sins" checklist on hand. The titular killer (Adam Lesar) shows up and the fun escalates as we wonder if Jenelle will make it to final girl status. Hamassian obviously loves classic slasher fare, and he treats his subject with reverence, making **Night of the Slasher** both a valentine to and satire of the genre. Berlina shines in her role, showing off a wide range of emotions. Hamassian expertly balances the ratio of horror to humor, freely playing with tropes and clichés in unexpected ways. Once the action kicks in, the pace remains relentless right up to the clever climax, with Adam Lesar turning in a creepy and physically demanding performance as the titular killer.

Sellers and Cassell also debuted the latest effort from their Wreak Havoc Productions. **Midnight Shift** is a verite-style horror short told from the POV of Sergeant Brown (voiced by Tom Gore), a sheriff's deputy wearing a body camera. He checks out a disturbance call and finds himself thrust into the middle of an exorcism attempt on a wheelchair-bound young man. Sellers wrote and directed, and he shows a knack for realistic dialogue. His approach to the exorcism subgenre wisely focuses more on suspense than shock tactics, and he raises the question of whether the subjects of exorcism would be better served by medical treatment than religious rituals.

Many of the talented people and projects featured at Wreak Havoc Horror Film Festival deserve a wider audience. With its selection of independent features and superb short films, this fest looks to be an important showcase for up-and-coming filmmakers and actors. 

THE CREEPER AND CREW: THE STRANGE WORLD OF CHRIS MICHAEL!

"When you can honestly offend and disgust, that is a positive step."

Chris Michael
Creeper Productions

Actor Christopher Michael has been a busy big- and small-screen presence since the 1980s, appearing in films like **Fools Rush In**, **The Cable Guy** and **Baadasssss!** and on TV series ranging from **ER** to **7th Heaven**. Frequently cast as cops, sheriffs and other law enforcement personnel, Michael created an entirely different sort of character, Jerome Jackson, aka The Creeper, for a series of low-budget indie comedy shorts and features produced in the '90s, available now under the heading **The Strange World of Chris Michael**.

The African American actor-turned-filmmaker kicks off to a fairly funny, funky start with his freewheeling 1992 debut, **How You Like Me Now?**, a 67-minute anything-goes action-movie spoof in which he introduces The Creeper, a proudly politically incorrect creation played by Michael in blackface (!) and an Afro wig, accompanied by an exaggerated old-school inner-city accent. Exhibiting a taste for wine, women and watermelon (to say nothing of malt liquor), The Creeper alternates between occupying center stage and hanging around the margins in Michael's films. In **How You Like Me Now?**, The Creeper works as an assistant mortician, while Michael doubles as federal agent Steele, the sort of role he typically inhabits in mainstream films and TV. Accompanied by his Caucasian partner (John Harwood), Steele goes undercover in a bid to bust a biological weapons ring that includes a frequently naked lady spy and a Curly Howard clone. Michael inhabits yet a third role, when, utilizing whiteface, straggly wig and prosthetic teeth, Steele poses as a dying white tycoon, who's been poisoned by his avaricious young wife. The pic's most impressive sequence arrives when Michael aggressively interacts with himself, via adroit cutaways, as both The Creeper and Steele when the two share the same car in pursuit of the bad guys. Despite its threadbare production values and shaky audiovisual quality, **How You Like Me Now?** offers its fair share of irreverent chuckles, along with a lively soundtrack by the L.A. heavy metal band Temporary Insanity. Fellow actor/filmmaker Mario Van Peebles surfaces, un-

der the pseudonym Brick Mason, in an amusing cameo as a TV reporter asking African American passersby if they think black movies cause violence ("yes," is their unanimous reply), while The Creeper sneaks in a fleeting reference to Mario's then-current hit movie **New Jack City**.

Michael's 1995 short, **Terror of Blood Gym**, is a less elaborate affair, with The Creeper, obeying the commands of his vampire master, bedeviling various gym visitors, chiefly muscle guys and bare babes. Despite cameos by auteur Michael as his both patented Creeper character *and* as a street drug-dealer likewise adorned with black-face and an Afro wig, his next, more ambitious effort, **The Bluesman** (1996), largely eschews humor for an earnest if offbeat cautionary approach. After the title character (Joe Romersa) hocks his grandfather's antique acoustic guitar to score enough cash for a fix, he lands an unexpected studio gig. Now lacking his axe (which actually wouldn't have been of much use anyhow since it's an *electric* blues session), he borrows an in-house guitar and blows everyone away with his virtuosity but is again seduced by Queen Heroin, a naked babe (porn starlet Jaclyn Lick) wielding an outsized syringe/dildo combo (!), with disastrous results. **The Bluesman** is deftly filmed, features a strong (if too brief) blues score but is an overwhelmingly downbeat experience (no doubt Michael's intent).

A somewhat older, possibly even wiser Creeper resurfaces in 2009's **Purgatory**. Co-scripted by Kim Delgado, **Purgatory** emerges as more of a tight-knit linear skit than the earlier Creeper shorts. Here, The Creeper joins lawyer Stan Greenblatt (Ken Stirbl), The Bluesman (Romersa reprising his original role), still foaming at the mouth from his fatal OD in **The Bluesman**, nun Sister Cornelia (Sharon Diane King) and other detainees in a claustrophobic afterlife waiting room where their fates will be decided by the expected scantily clad gals. While they anxiously cool their heels, Creeper and Greenblatt engage in a philosophical debate that turns violently physical. Stirbl is especially sharp as the self-justifying attorney who explains why he deserves a spot in heaven ("thank God I did all those pro bono cases"). Shot digitally, **Purgatory** abandons the rugged videotape look of the earlier shorts, sporting a clear look that helps sell the well-constructed gags.

Michael's magnum opus (thus far), the 96-minute **Limp Fangs: The Adventures of Count Malt-Liquela** (1996) casts the filmmaker/thesp as the eponymous vampire, sort of a low-rent Blacula who awakens from his undead state to discover a world where vampires, led by long-haired rock star Falstaff (Delbert Howison), have launched their own political party. Beyond culture shock, the Count must deal with the embarrassing issue cited in the title. But no matter how many 64-ounce bottles of Creeper brand malt liquor he imbibes, the Count can't quite straighten his problem. The Count prefers to spend his waking hours relaxing in his coffin watching TV and



Actor/auteur Chris Michael (alias The Creeper).

occasionally consulting his **Sesame Street** The Count doll. The Creeper, meanwhile, puts in a cameo hawking his alcoholic concoction, while character actor and erstwhile Russ Meyer regular Charles (**The Silence of the Lambs**) Napier shows up to strum a guitar and lip-synch a country tune, Reginald (**Die Hard**) Vel Johnson plays an excitable preacher, rocker Michael Des Barres handles intermittent narration chores, and body-builder Square-Head cameos as strongman Arnold Schwarzenegro. Much of the action is set in L.A.'s premier horror emporium, Dark Delicacies, which Falstaff uses as his HQ.

While raw and ragged in spots, Chris Michael's filmmaking oeuvre definitely earns its "Strange World" sobriquet, conjuring the days when outlaw videos often found their way into vidstores and offbeat homevid libraries. It would be interesting to see what Michael might fashion with a bigger budget and higher production values. It may be time for The Creeper and cronies to mount a comeback. Meantime, you can score more Creeper info on page 47. ☿

—The Phantom

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CULT CHILLS!

WARNER ARCHIVE

(\$21.95 Blu-ray each) 10/17, 9/17

THE HIDDEN (1987) 88/1/2

D: Jack Sholder. Michael Nouri, Kyle MacLachlan, Ed O'Ross, Clu Gulager, Claudia Christian, William Boyett. 98 mins. 10/17

Warner Archive celebrates this underrated genre gem's 30th Anniversary with a sharp new extras-equipped Blu-ray. While *The Hidden* recycles elements from such varied sources as *Lethal Weapon*, *The Terminator*, *Night of the Creeps*, *The Brain from Planet Arous*, and even comicdom's *J'onn J'onzz: Martian Crimefighter*, while anticipating 1989's *Alien Nation*, Sholder's movie, deftly scripted by Bob Hunt, manages to emerge as a highly entertaining effort with an eccentric tone all its own. Fueled by Michael Convertino's electronic score, our story involves ace LAPD dick Tom Beck (Nouri), spacey "FBI agent" Lloyd Gallagher (MacLachlan) and their mutual if mismatched search for a series of seemingly random maniacs partial to heavy metal and fast Ferraris and who enjoy stealing and killing to get their hands on same. (Sounds like your typical '80s Hollywood personality profile.) As it quickly turns out, the assorted psychos—who include a fat guy with gastritis (Boyett), a zoftig stripper (Christian) and a dog (!)—are merely serving as the unwitting hosts for your basic amoral alien slime-creature who uses them till their bodies give out, then moves on to its next victim, relay race-style. Lending texture to this lively film-long chase—which features a prolonged police massacre to rival such contemporaneous bloodbaths as *The Terminator*, *The Hitcher*, and *Ninja 3: The Domination*—is the gradual bond that develops between human cop Nouri and his cosmic counterpart MacLachlan (though they never get as seriously involved as *Lethal Weapon*'s Mel Gibson and Danny Glover). In *VS* #103, *'Scope* interviewee Nouri touched upon his troubled working relationship with director Sholder, who articulates his side of the story here in an archival audio commentary shared with fellow director Tim (River's Edge) Hunter; other holdovers from the 2000 DVD edition include a Special Effects Production Footage featurette narrated by Sholder and the original theatrical trailer. Avoid the insipid sequel *The Hidden 2* (*VS* #10). What we'd love to see next is an extras-enhanced Blu-ray edition of Sholder's sly 1982 metaslasher classic *Alone in the Dark*, boasting an all-star cast headed by late genre giants Donald Pleasence, Martin Landau and Jack Palance. Hopefully, an Arrow Video, Kino, Blue Underground or other quality outfit will step up to the plate.



INNOCENT BLOOD (1992) 88/1/2

D: John Landis. Anne Parillaud, Robert Loggia, Anthony LaPaglia, Don Rickles, David Proval, Chazz Palminteri, Angela Bassett. 115 mins.

Sort of a Mafia-vampire variation on his earlier *An American Werewolf in London* (*VS* #73), Landis' bloodsucker romp pits sexy she-vamp Marie (Parillaud, fresh from *La Femme Nikita*) against a crew of Pittsburgh wiseguys whom our heroine affectionately refers to as "my food." The mob-gobbling gal has authorities baffled until she teams up with undercover cop Joe Gennaro (LaPaglia) to stop crazed capo Sallie (The Shark) Macelli (Loggia), whose necking session with Marie has transformed him from a monstrous Mafioso into a bloodsucking monstrous Mafioso. The assembled thespians look like they had a good time with this one, though none more than Loggia, who attacks his fangster role with relish (to say nothing of ham). Rickles registers well as Manny, Loggia's nervous attorney turned literal bloodsucker (arguably the renowned insult comic's best genre-film appearance since his straight turn as a grubby carnival barker in Roger Corman's 1963 sci-fi classic *X—The Man with the X-ray Eyes* [*VS* #86]); his sun-driven meltdown provides the pic with one of its primo FX set pieces (courtesy of makeup maven Steve Johnson). Landis likewise peppers his film with offbeat celeb cameos, including bits by late *Famous Monsters of Filmland* founder Forry Ackerman, directors Dario Argento, Sam Raimi, Michael Ritchie, and Frank Oz (in a particularly funny stint). effects ace Tom Savini and scream queen Linnea Quigley (who gives her pipes a high-decibel airing). Buffs will also appreciate clips from *Beast from 20,000 Fathoms*, *Dracula*, *Horror of Dracula*, *Phantom of the Rue Morgue* and *Strangers on a Train*. Several effective cheap scares and disgusto images (especially during an autopsy sequence) dot the movie, as do future *Sopranos* cast members like Loggia (perhaps best known as *Scarface*'s greedy coke kingpin Frank Lopez), Proval (Richie Aprile), Tony Sirico (Paulie Walnuts), and Tony Lip (Carmine Lupertazzi Sr.). *Innocent Blood* is the type of frightcom that goes in one eye and out the other but supplies good gory fun while it lasts. Warner Archive's new Blu-ray grants the film full audiovisual justice.

—The Phantom

BLUE UNDERGROUND

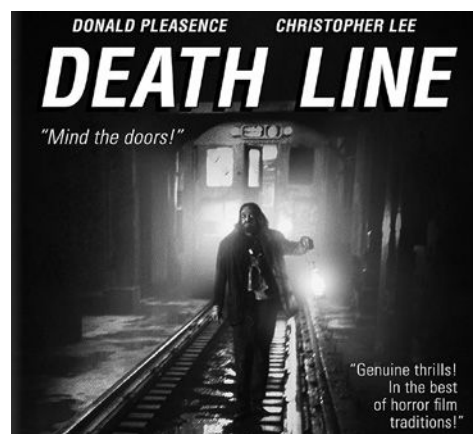
(\$39.98 2-disc Blu-ray + DVD) 6/17

DEATH LINE (1972) 88/1/2

D: Gary Sherman. Donald Pleasence, Norman Rossington, David Ladd, Sharon Gurney, Hugh Armstrong, Christopher Lee. 87 mins. (Blue Underground) 6/17

Students Ladd and Gurney find a collapsed politician in the Russell Square station of the London Underground. When they bring a policeman back for help, the man is gone. Inspector Pleasence realizes this missing person is merely the latest in a series at the station and he launches an investigation. What no one knows is that these people are being abducted, killed and eaten by Armstrong, the last survivor of generations of workers trapped in the tunnels since a cave-in 90 years earlier. Feral, plague-ridden, unable to speak except to parrot the phrase "Mind the doors!" and consumed by grief following the death of his mate, Armstrong is one of the most pitiable monsters in horror, despite being genuinely frightening, too. An eight-and-a-half minute shot that creeps through Armstrong's lair, revealing decomposing bodies and showing the two cannibals holding on to each other as the woman lies on her deathbed, achieves the extraordinary feat of fusing the utterly disgusting with deep, moving tenderness. The decor anticipates that of *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* by two years, but Armstrong's cannibal has far more in common with Boris Karloff's Frankenstein Monster than with Leatherface. Pleasence, meanwhile, is enormous fun as the irascible, working-class inspector. Michael Gingold's essay in the disc's booklet informs us that Pleasence took the part because he "always wanted to do a comedy," and indeed that's how he plays it, bringing a gritty humor to the film. Pleasence uses his facility with accents to underscore the film's themes of class conflict, which come to a head in a brief encounter with Christopher Lee (whose upper-class functionary is far more worthy of hate than the suffering cannibal). Funny, horrifying and sad, this is one of the best UK horror films of the '70s. The plentiful extras include a commentary with Sherman, producer Paul Maslansky and assistant director Lewis More O'Ferrall, and a raft of interviews. 8

—David Annandale



BACK TO THE BELCOURT 12 HOURS OF TERROR!

By Rob Freese

On October 21st, 2017, Nashville's Belcourt Theater played host to its annual **12 Hours of Terror** marathon. It started with great anticipation as costumed attendees in line compared notes as to how many previous Terrorthons they had attended over the years and how far they'd gotten with each one. (For the record, this was my fifth, the fourth accompanied by my bride-to-be Sherri, who came decked out in full witch costume while I went the trick-or-treat route in my **Halloween III** Pumpkin mask and Carl Kolchak tee. Also for the record, we've stayed until the final film every time.) There was also much speculation as to what the roundup of titles would include, as the Belcourt kept the list of films a secret beyond the first two titles.

Nashville's all-monster rock band the Boo Dudes took to the stage to get everyone cranked up. The trailer for Al Adamson's **Dracula vs. Frankenstein** played on the big screen behind them in a wash of psychedelic colors as the creeps belted out their popular ditty "Dracula's 2nd DUI." The show finally got off to a loud, colorful, surreal but ultimately slow and boring start with Dario Argento's **Inferno**. The 35mm Fox Archival print looked fantastic, but the older I get the more I realize I just don't connect to this movie. I know it's supposed to be a nightmare fever dream, but scenes of Leigh McCloskey opening a letter to the accompaniment of Keith Emerson's blasting, nerve-fraying synth-rock score made me wonder why Argento was trying to trick me into

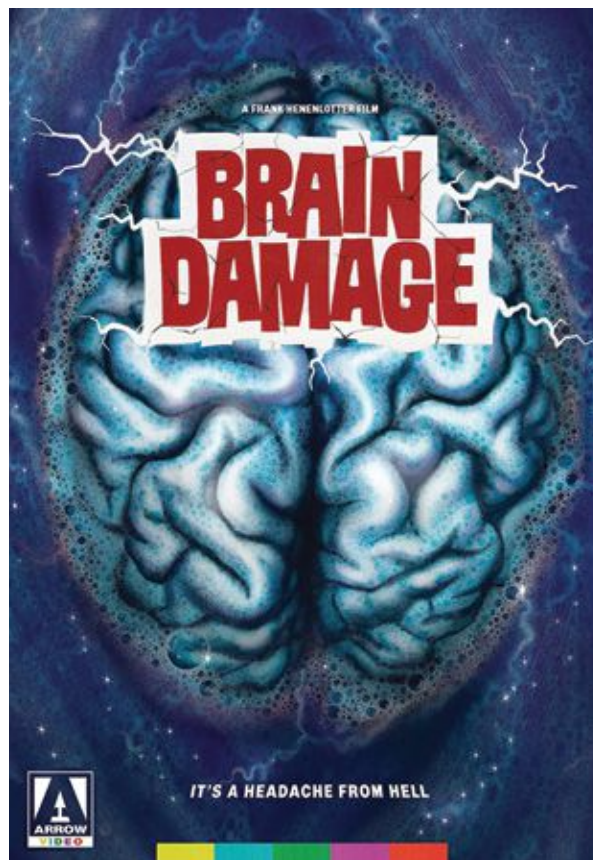
thinking something exciting was happening on screen. I became extremely fidgety way before the film's halfway point.

The proceedings got back on track with the superior teenage werewolf tale **Ginger Snaps**, courtesy of director John Fawcett's personal 35mm print, the only 35mm print of this film in existence. As far as I'm concerned, the **12 Hours of Terror** officially started with the marathon's second feature and hit all its high points over the next couple entries. A wonderfully scratched and red-tinted 35mm print of **Dead & Buried** followed and garnered the night's biggest audience reaction when poor Freddie, already beaten, butchered and burned beyond recognition, received his hypodermic needle to the eyeball demise. A giant gasp filled the theater as the entire audience, moving as one, jerked away from the screen in a single spastic wave. Good job, Gary Sherman, Stan Winston and Company! Your flick still works nearly 40 years later!

Film four kept everyone awake giggling and gagging as Frank Henenlotter's **Brain Damage** filled the screen with psychedelic weirdness. It was 90 solid minutes of nervous laughter from an audience who never knew what was coming next. Local horror host Dr. Gangrene was on hand to introduce the film and give brief props to Elmer voice actor and late, great legendary Cool Ghoul John Zacherle, who he praised as being the original horror host who "all the rest of us were inspired by."

Film five, **Dark Waters**, pretty much derailed the Terrorthon for me, a grueling endurance test about island nuns versus an ambiguous sea monster. We were warned that this film was not for everyone and many people left before it was over. They were the lucky ones. I know many consider it a '90s foreign fright classic, but I am not among those fans. It was followed by a movie I felt completely "wasted a turn," **Jennifer's Body**. I mean, I appreciated Diablo Cody's sharp dialogue and the mix of horror and humor, but I've never had any desire to see it, knowing if I ever did want to watch it that it is available in every bargain movie bin everywhere physical media is still sold, as well as all over cable and Netflix. It is literally *everywhere*! And, unfortunately, it showed up on the Belcourt's screen too.

Stretching beyond sunrise into mid-morning, the final flick, **Grave Robbers**, splashed across the screen. This lame-brained, late-'80 Mexican slasher film is also known as **Ladones de Tumbas**. It was presented with subtitles, which is asking a lot of an audience 10 1/2 hours deep into



this 12-hour movie marathon; happily, it became apparent early on that this film had no real plot whatsoever, and the subtitles were just the characters' names being screamed over and over again as the mad monk buried his sharp axe into their empty skulls.

As always, the Belcourt proved a gracious host. There was excellent food available not only from the concession stand but from a food truck that stayed for all seven movies. Between the movies there were more tunes from the Boo Dudes, a costume contest, a food-eating contest, and a horror paperback giveaway to encourage more horror reading. A huge effort was made by the staff and it was much appreciated. (I do hope the Belcourt considers discontinuing its "mystery lineup" strategy for 2018.) Eyes burning in the morning sun, we were all awarded "I Survived Belcourt's Twelve Hours of Terror" buttons as we lined up for our annual "survivors photo" in front of the theater.

If you live in the Nashville area or are close enough to make Nashville a day trip, I really urge you to check out the various shows the Belcourt offers throughout the year. This past year has included not only a regular offering of the finest new independent films but retrospectives that pay tribute to the work of Dario Argento, as well as a series of great giallos and regular retro midnight shows of stuff like the original **Friday the 13th**, **The Rocky Horror Picture Show**, **The Room**, **Smitherens** and many, many more classic films of all types. Check them out at belcourt.com or find them on Facebook. ☘

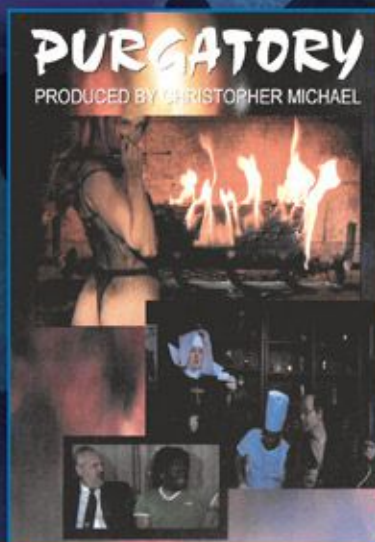


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MEETING MANSON!

By Wade Williams

THE NEWS ABOUT Charlie Manson, the mastermind of the murderous Manson Clan that terrorized and murdered Sharon Tate and others in Los Angeles a half-century ago, brings back vivid memories of meeting Manson—face to face!

It was in the late 1960s that an ex-con named Charles Manson and a group of "hippies" murdered their way across the Los Angeles area, killing movie star Sharon Tate and other celebrities. The town was terrified. Days went by until a break in the case led the police to this group of "drugged out" hippies who lived in a deserted old-time movie ranch. Manson and the rest of the clan were arrested and went to trial on what must stand as the most notorious murder rampage of its time. The trial went for weeks and the news media from all over the world covered it.

Living in Kansas City and wanting to get into the movie business was hard. I was halfway to Hollywood or to New York. I had made an amateur science fiction film **Terror from the Stars** several years before but it never got distribution because it was frankly not well made and we did not know what we were doing or how to do it right. Frank Howard, a film friend I had met through the film collecting hobby, worked for an industrial film company in Minnesota, and it was his dream to make a theatrical feature film quickly and cheaply, make a lot of money, and then make something big and worth-

while. During dinner at Winsteads, the people at the table behind us were talking about the Manson murder trial and how horrible it was. Frank said, "Why don't we make a 'quickie' film in black-and-white based on the Manson murders since the trial will probably go on for a while. It could play the drive-in circuits." We talked about the possibilities for several hours and the next day started on the pre-production planning. Frank had made many films for industrial clients like John Deere and was an excellent cameraman and director.

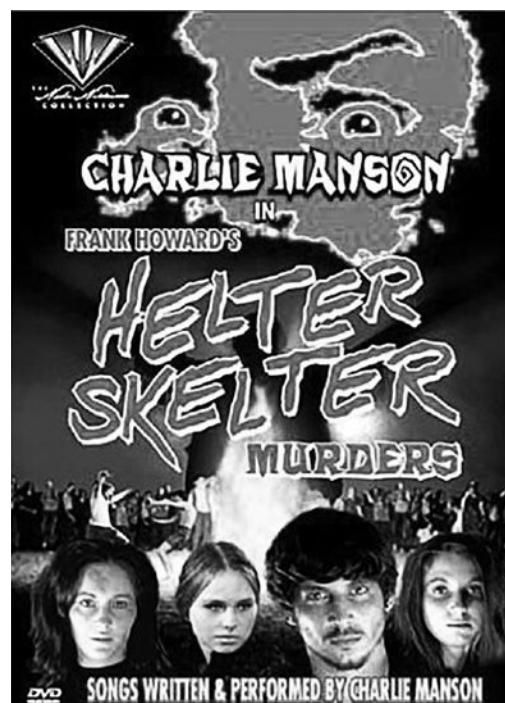
We scripted daily when more information was revealed at the trial. I named it **The Other Side of Madness** on its first release. They changed the name to **Helter Skelter Murders** after the book **Helter Skelter** became a best-seller. The film was to be shot in Kansas City and Los Angeles. The substantiating footage in L.A. and the murder sequences at various locations in Kansas City, Leawood, Kansas, and a rock concert near Lawrence, Kansas—all subbing for LA.

I did not want to make this film. I had little or no interest. I wanted to remake science fiction films like **Man from Planet X**, **Rocketship X-M**, etc. It was Frank Howard's and my dream to make a cheap and highly profitable film and use the money to make something we wanted to make.

There was an announcement in the trade papers and I received a call from Charles Manson's attorney who was representing him for free and getting a lot of flak. He wanted to sell me the rights to two songs recorded and sung by Charlie Manson—"Mechanical Man" and "Garbage Dump." The deal: \$2000 for the rights and a three-hour face-to-face meeting with Charlie Manson in the jail during the trial. Manson could have no visitors except witnesses necessary for his defense. I was listed by his attorney as one of those witnesses.

It was arranged the following Friday. I flew to L.A. with cash. I was given the recording masters and taken to the jailhouse to meet with Manson. I expected to see the sinister Rasputin monster of a man depicted on the cover of **Life** magazine; instead I was seated at a table across from Charlie in a regular room. A guard stood by the door. It was a small man, maybe 140 pounds, in blue jailhouse garb. I introduced myself and he said, "You're the man that's making my movie?" There was nothing sinister about him, just wild hair and a Nazi tattoo. I realized the news media and **Life** magazine had re-touched his picture to make him look like the Devil to sell magazines.

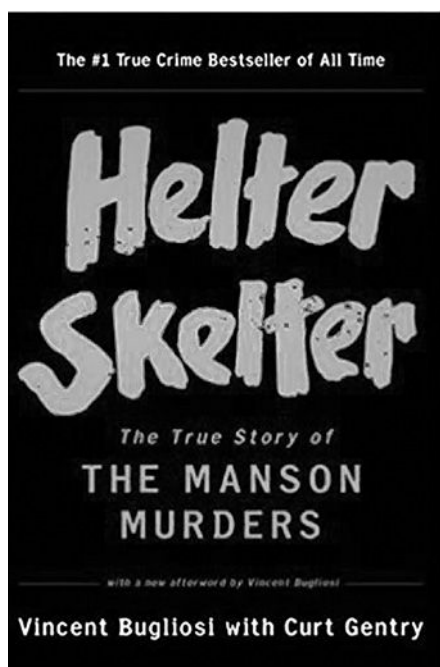
We were not to discuss the actuality of what happened at the murder scene because Manson was not at the Tate house. He sent the clan up to terrorize the occupants because he thought a record producer—the late Terry Melcher, Doris Day's son, lived there. He was angry because Melcher would not use his music. I was there



about an hour. He talked about the people at the Spahn Movie Ranch and the 80-year-old George Spahn, I believe was his name, owned the place and allowed him and his family to stay there. One of his followers was the granddaughter of the Mitchell Camera fortune. He talked about giving shelter to the homeless and downtrodden and they were mostly druggies and acid users. He used the "N" word several time and despised blacks, having been in prison with them. He and his family wanted a "race war" to exterminate them and was gathering weapons out in the desert to eliminate them. His attorney changed the subject after a few comments.

We cast the film with unknown look-alikes from Kansas City, family members, friends, several actors and my secretary. Sequences on the Plaza subbed for Century City. Getting it finished and released in theaters is a complete other story; however, the film was distributed world-wide, got a front page story in **Variety** and in London and many tabloids. [Frank Howard's] efforts and talent made this a unique "art-house" film noir that has a moody black-and-white feel and a Technicolor sequence with Debbie Duff and Kelly Cap who played Sharon Tate and the Prince in a dream sequence. It played the drive-in circuits and the VHS and DVD markets. Had many good reviews and made news in tabloids worldwide. We did a sneak preview in Excelsior Springs, Kansas, to a sold-out theater. I plan to re-release it when the Quentin Tarantino film on the Manson murders comes out next year. ☿

In addition to owning movie theaters and heading video distribution companies like Englewood Entertainment, industry veteran Wade Williams' produced the feature films **The Other Side of Madness**, **Terror from the Stars** and the 1992 remake of Edgar G. Ulmer's **Detour**, which he also directed.



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DIGITAL DEBUTS

ALPHA VIDEO

(\$5.98 DVD) 6/17

GUN MOLL (aka GANG SMASHERS)

(1938)B&W

D: Leo C. Popkin. Nina Mae McKinney, Monte Hawley, Laurence Criner, Mantan Moreland, Reginald Fenderson, Neva Peoples. 60 mins.

Free of the frequent amateurish touches (rushed takes, flubbed lines, garbled sound, et al) that marred many African American indie productions of the period, **Gun Moll** (originally **Gang Smashers**) is a stripped-down but thoroughly professional B flick that hews fairly closely to the contemporaneous Warner Bros. crime-movie playbook. Commanding-voiced Criner, in the Edward G. Robinson role, runs a lucrative Harlem protection racket operating in offices above his night club. Unbeknownst to each other, both house chanteuse Laura Jackson (McKinney) and imported criminal efficiency expert Lefty Wilson (Hawley) are undercover agents who've infiltrated the organization to get the goods on Criner and crew. Few plot surprises dot the by-numbers plot, but **Gun Moll's** got personality galore, largely supplied by talented and charismatic former mainstream movie and cabaret star McKinney, who croons a tune or two. Versatile comic relief Moreland usually steals these shows all by his lonesome (see his timeless turn in **King of the Zombies**), but rather than occupying his usual niche as the hero's sidekick, he's relegated here to a secondary role as the gang's unofficial court jester Gloomy; Mantan still manages to work in some funny verbal bits and physical schtick while finding time to dance a very impressive jive number. For a rare glimpse (especially by white auds of the day) at urban black culture, '30s-style, folded into a standard but entertaining crime pic, **Gun Moll** more than fills the bill and boasts much better music, courtesy of Phil Moore's swing band, than the vast majority of its Cauc counterparts.

FILM MOVEMENT

(\$39.95 Blu-ray) 9/17

HANA-BI (FIREWORKS) (1997)

D: Takeshi Kitano. "Beat" Takeshi, Kayoko Kishimoto, Ren Osugi, Susumu Terajima, Tetsu Watanabe. 103 mins.

Erstwhile one-man media machine Kitano—a prolific, irreverent Renaissance man who wrote, directed, produced and starred in feature films, acted in other directors' projects (e.g., **Battle Royale**, the live-action **Ghost in the Shell**), earned acclaim as a stand-up comic, hosted several weekly TV shows,

many with an emphasis on extreme jackassing, and penned newspaper and magazine columns—followed his crackling 1993 Yakuza yarn **Sonatine** (VS #21) with this stunning masterwork. Here, Kitano adopts his familiar but devastatingly effective dead-eyed, frozen-faced, ultra-laconic emotive posture as Nishi, a veteran hard-case Tokyo detective in serious hock to Yakuza loan sharks (much to their eventual bloody regret) and burdened by intense personal tragedy. It's implied that the death of their young daughter contributed to his wife's (Kishimoto) terminal illness, a condition that's never identified. Much of **Haba-Bi** details Nishi's final weeks with her as they drive around in silence deeply and lovingly communing via such innocent activities as card games and picnics. After his partner (Osugi) is crippled in a shoot-out, Nishi quits the force and forges a new career as a bank robber (wearing a police uniform, no less), diverting part of the loot to buy art supplies for his injured, increasingly suicidal friend. The latter later takes up painting in earnest, creating canvases inhabited by an array of flower-faced people and animals (actually drawn by the versatile Kitano). Kitano likewise applies a painterly approach to his celluloid canvas, with images of blood, snow and flowers emerging as recurring motifs. No one can combine elegaic road trips and sudden chopsticks in the eye quite like Kitano, and this meditation on mortality rates as his most profound statement to date. Bonus features include a commentary by David Fear, a making-of featurette, and a new essay by Jason Sharp.

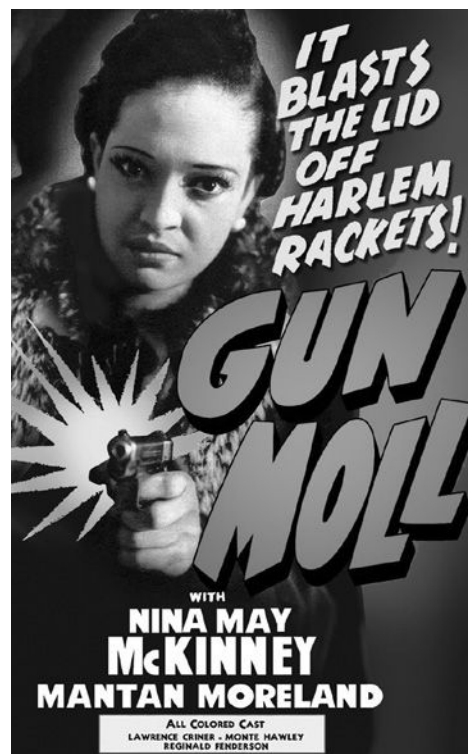
KINO LORBER

(\$29.95 Blu-ray each) 10/17

CITY OF INDUSTRY (1997)

D: John Irvin. Harvey Keitel, Stephen Dorff, Timothy Hutton, Famke Janssen, Wade Dominguez, Michael Jai White. 97 mins.

A typically charismatic Keitel breaks out his **Reservoir Dogs** tough-guy chops (with a bit of **Bad Lieutenant** macho sobbing thrown into the mix) as Roy Egan, a retirement-minded criminal who teams up with his brother Lee (Hutton) and the latter's pal Jorge (Dominguez) to pull off that ever-elusive one big score in an edgy, adrenalizing seedy L.A.-set caper sharply scripted by vet TV writer Ken Solarz. Throwing a proverbial monkey wrench into the crew's best-laid plans is sketchy getaway driver Skip Kovich (Dorff, as sort of a psycho punk Richard Widmark), whose wild-card antics eventually set a bruised and battered Roy on a relentless revenge mission. Roy receives considerable aid and comfort from Jorge's distraught wife Rachel (former super-model Janssen, ably flexing her then-newly acquired thespian muscles), as the two delve ever deeper into the City of Angels' most infernal precincts. The action and tension never let up, driven both by the leads' intense performances, Stephen Endelman's exciting score, and sometime James Bond helmer Irvin's propulsive direction. Though somewhat more modestly mounted, **City of Industry** can take its place beside such dark '90s urban thrill rides as Tarantino's afore-



mentioned **Reservoir Dogs** (VS #86), Steven Soderbergh's **Out of Sight** (VS #29) and Michael Mann's **Heat** (VS #19). Extras include an audio commentary by **King Cohen** director Steve Mitchell and film historian Nathaniel Thompson, along with the original theatrical trailer.

ROLLING VENGEANCE (1987)

D: Steven H. Stern. Don Michael Paul, Ned Beatty, Lawrence Dane, Lisa Howard, Todd Duckworth, Michael J. Reynolds. 90 mins. 10/17

Saddled with the distinctive dull flatness and tonal pallor that pervades many Canadian genre productions, **Rolling Vengeance** kicks off to a slow start with several somnolent scenes detailing young Joey Rosso's (Paul) life with his wholesome family. But when said family gets totaled via a series of violent vehicular "accidents" engineered by evil go-go bar owner Tiny Doyle (Beatty, channeling the Fonz with greaseball hairstyle, black leather threads and a blackened front tooth for good measure) and his five rather interchangeable moronic sons, **Rolling Vengeance** switches into high gear, turning into a **Death Wish** on wheels as Joey wields his hand-tooled mother of all monster trucks to squash the opposition (and everything else in his sizable path) in lovingly lensed detail. While the flick may be short on subtlety and logic, it's admirably long on authentic monster-truck thrills. Kino tricks out its crisp new Blu-ray edition with an interview with costar and veteran Canadian character actor Dane (cast here as Big Joe Rosso, Joey's hardworking, noble-hearted trucker dad), an audio commentary by genre-film historians Paul Corupe and Jason Pichonsky, and the original theatrical trailer.

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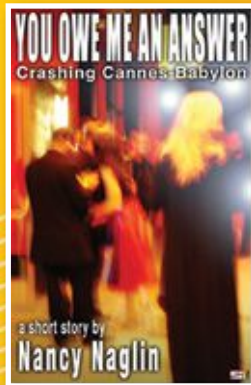
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ABOUT NANCY NAGLIN:

Author, film critic and freelance writer Nancy Naglin has been the Art-House columnist for *The Phantom of the Movies' VideoScope* since 1993. Her work has appeared in numerous publications, including *The New York Daily News*, *New York Magazine*, *The Village Voice* and *Crawdaddy*.

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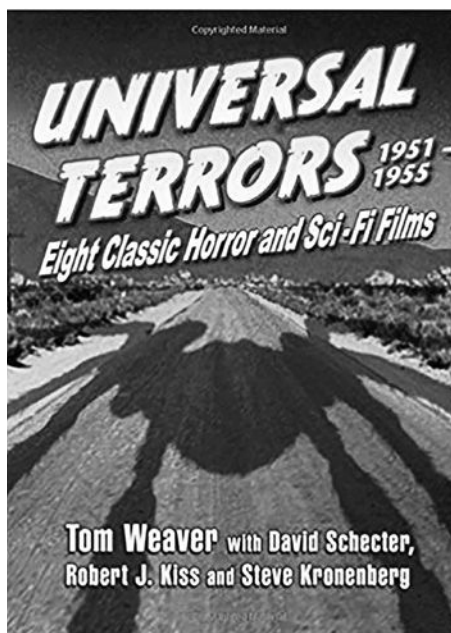
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PHANTOM BOOKSHELF

UNIVERSAL TERRORS, 1951-1955: Eight Classic Horror and Sci-Fi Films By Tom Weaver, with David Schecter, Robert J. Kiss and Steve Kronenberg. McFarland & Co., Inc. Softcover. Photo Illustrated. 440 pages. \$49.95

Cine scholar Weaver and esteemed compatriots apply their single-film **Scripts from the Crypt** series (BearManor Media) approach to this fresh volume, sans the scripts but with detailed info and backstories on fully eight boomer-beloved movies. Proceeding in chronological order, the tome delves deep into the relatively obscure Boris Karloff-costarred costume thrillers **The Strange Door** (1951) and **The Black Castle** (1952), Jack Arnold's powerful 1953 3D Ray Bradbury adaptation **It Came from Outer Space** (the first chiller yours truly ever witnessed on the big screen), the much-celebrated **Creature from the Black Lagoon** (1954), the Metaluna-bound **This Island Earth** (1955), the sequel **Revenge of the Creature** (1955), the generally underrated serpentine scarefest **Cult of the Cobra** (1955), and the outsized spider epic **Tarantula** (1955). The 1950s repped an era of renewed glory for the studio that had brought us **Frankenstein**, **Dracula** (both 1931) and a host of other classic horrors, a stellar initial stretch that effectively ended, following a



slew of lower-bracketed sequels and B efforts, in 1945. As in the **Scripts from the Crypts** books, **Universal Terrors** presents a thorough account of each '50s film's genesis, production and critical reception, complete with story synopsis and marginalia, along with a fascinating rundown of its release history, from first-run to sub-run, by Robert J. Kiss, an in-depth section by David Schecter dealing with the composer and score, and much more. This is not a book designed to be devoured in a single sitting but one tailored to provide many days and nights of addictive entertainment for monster kids and movie buffs of all stripes. ⚡

End Credits Contributing Writers

- ⚡David Annandale's latest **Warhammer 40,000** novel is **Castellan**: blacklibrary.com.
- ⚡Dan Cziraky was last seen boarding his backyard TARDIS.
- ⚡The dynamic dad-daughter duo of **Terry & Tiffany DuFoe** operate the award-winning Internet radio station **Cult Radio A-Go-Go!**
- ⚡Ronald Charles Epstein's book reviews are quoted on Amazon.ca.
- ⚡Tim Ferrante provided an expanded Duane Jones audio interview for Criterion's **Night of the Living Dead 4K Blu-ray**.
- ⚡Robert Freese was last seen at The Cosmic Drive-In and on Facebook.
- ⚡Chris Hallock is a freelance genre journalist.
- ⚡Joe Kane considers himself a citizen of the planet (not necessarily this one).
- ⚡Nancy Naglin's novel, **The Salvation Army Tales**, is now available from Amazon.com in both softcover and e-book form.
- ⚡Joseph Perry covers the international genre-film festival beat.
- ⚡Debbie Rochon is an actress, director, author and radio talk-show host.
- ⚡John Seal does not plan to spend Sunday in the country.
- ⚡Jeff Strate is a seasoned TV producer/writer.
- ⚡Don Vaughan is the author of **Reel Tears: The Beverly Washburn Story** (BearManor).
- ⚡Scott Voisin's **Character Kings 2** is available from BearManor Media.
- ⚡Wade Williams produced the Charles Manson-themed film **The Other Side of Madness**.

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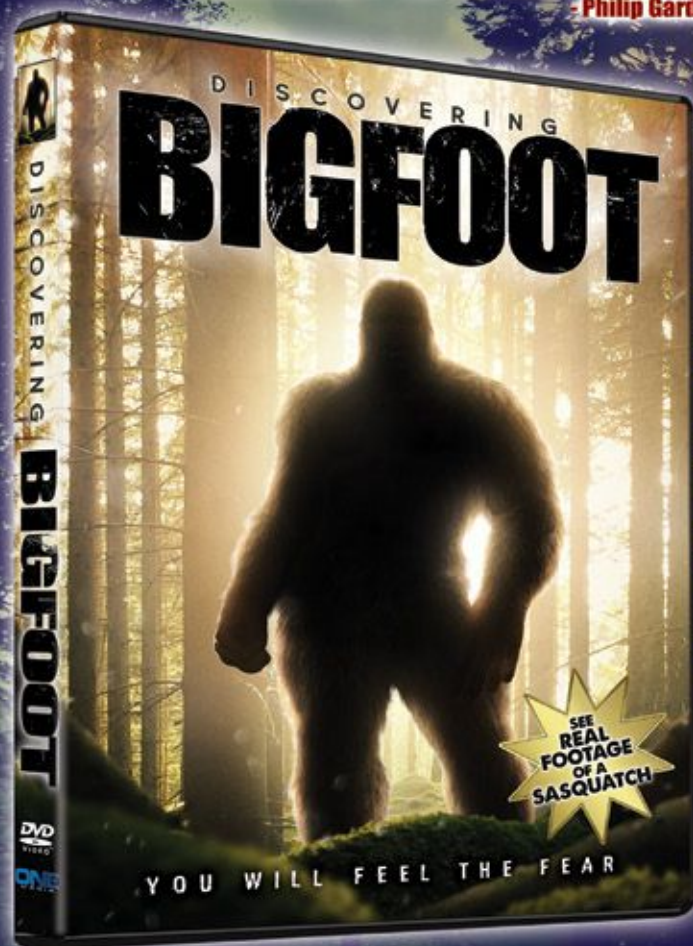
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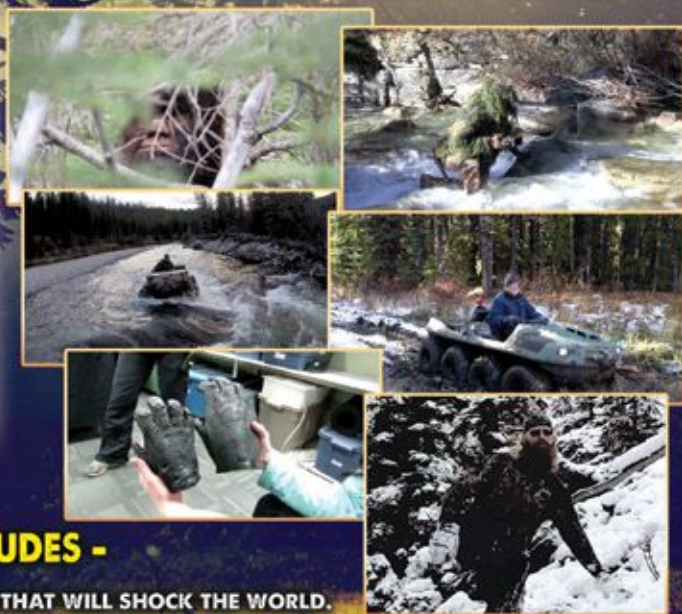
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PHANTOM PHLASHES!

HORROR HORIZON: Universal Studios intros the surprise horror hit **Happy Death Day**, while Warner Home Entertainment unleashes the Stephen King-based blockbuster **It**, and Paramount puts out Darren (Black Swan) Aronofsky's surreal scarefest **Mother!**, starring Jennifer Lawrence, Javier Bardem, Ed Harris and Michell Pfeiffer. In the sequel rites arena, director Victor Salva resumes his venerable fright franchise with **Jeepers Creepers 3** (Screen Media), featuring Gina Philips and Meg (They Live) Foster, while Stephen Dorff and Lili Taylor top-line in the **Texas Chainsaw Massacre** prequel **Leatherface** (Lionsgate Entertainment). A trio of Christmas creepshows, **Better Watch Out** (Well Go USA), **Once Upon a Time at Christmas** (Lionsgate) and **Red Christmas** (Artsploitation), further swell that holiday's already voluminous fear-film ranks. **The Walking Dead** regular Steven Yuen, meanwhile, toplines in the survival terror tale **Mayhem** (RLJ Entertainment).

ACTION UPDATE: On the action front, Vince (Term Life) Vaughn continues to hone his newfound action chops in Craig (Bone Tomahawk) Zahler's prison punch-up **Brawl in Cell Block 99** (RLJ). Action icon Jackie Chan tears a page from Liam Neeson's playbook in the **Taken** variation **The Foreigner** (Universal Studios), while Arnold Schwarzenegger dusts off his 'pecs and lats to go the meta-route in the hitman mockumentary **Killing Gunther** (Lionsgate), and Jeff Bridges, Halle Berry, and Colin Firth are among the many name thespians surfacing in the sequel **Kingsman: The Golden Circle** (20th Century Fox). Elsewhere, Warner issues the blockbuster WWII epic **Dunkirk**, and Wu Jing headlines in the Chinese import **The Wolf Warrior 2** (Well Go USA).

SCI-FI FORECAST: While it may have underperformed somewhat at 'plexes, the much-anticipated sci-fi sequel **Blade Runner 2049** (Warner), with Harrison Ford reprising his original role, backed by Ryan Gosling and Ana de Armas, should cause more of a stir in home-viewing venues. Also due are Sony Pictures' remake of the 1990 success **Flatliners**, with Ellen Page and Diego Luna, and Warner's climate-change disaster outing **Geostorm**, with Gerard Butler. Elsewhere on the sci-fi front RLJ Entertainment issues the indie **Osiris Child** and Monarch releases the disaster film **Shockwave: Countdown to Disaster**.

KILLER THRILLERS: Three caper-related efforts arrive to bolster the digital thriller roster: John Cusack headlines in **Blood Money**, vet actors Tom Berenger and Michael Jai White share top billing in **Cops and Robbers** (both Lionsgate), and Sidewinder

Films proffers **The Heist**. Christa B. Allen cops starring honors in the evil cult suspense **One of Us** (Monarch Home Entertainment), while a high-profile cast led by Matt Damon and Julianne Moore tangle in director George Clooney's largely ill-received satiric thriller **Suburbicon** (Paramount), drawn from a decades-old Coen Bros script. ⚡

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(1989)

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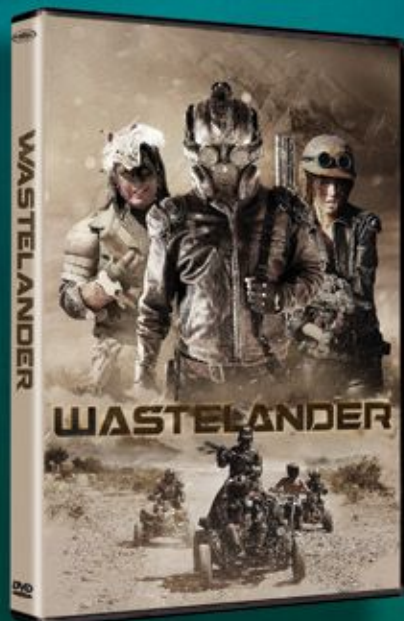


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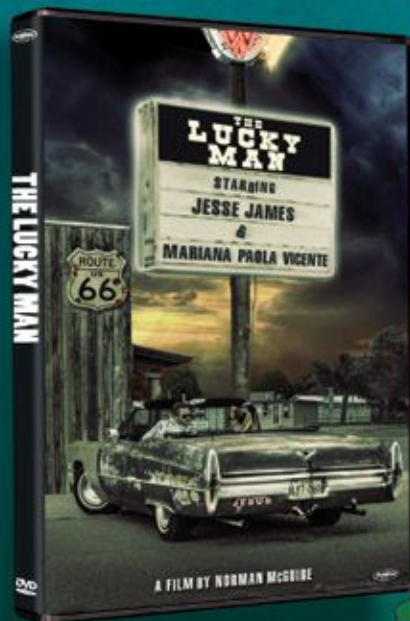
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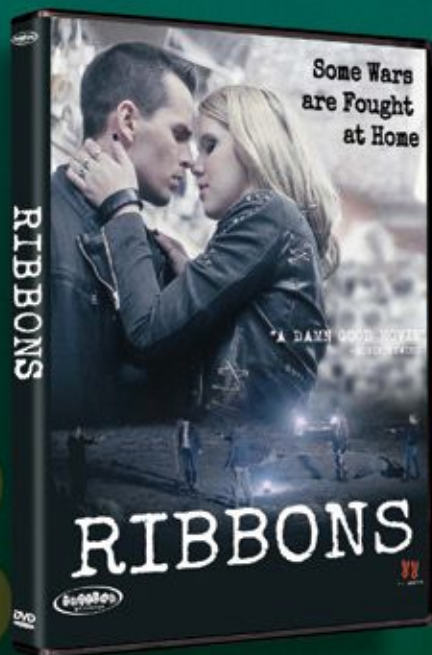
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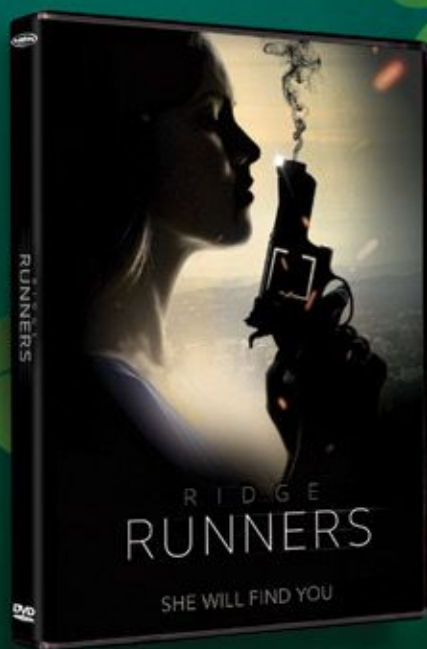
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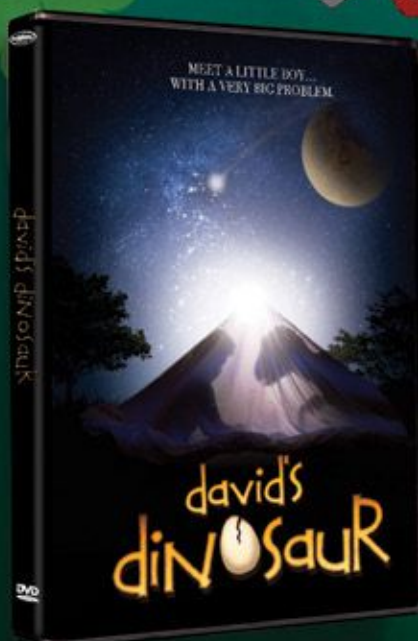
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